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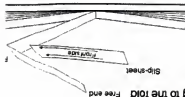
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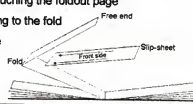
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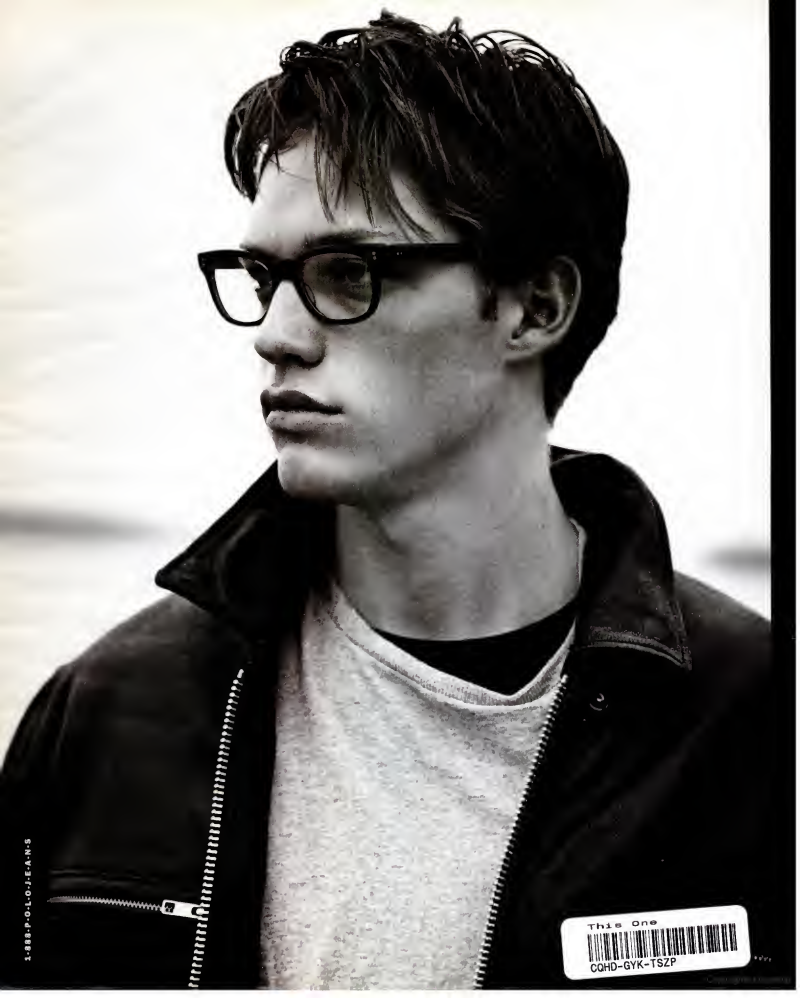
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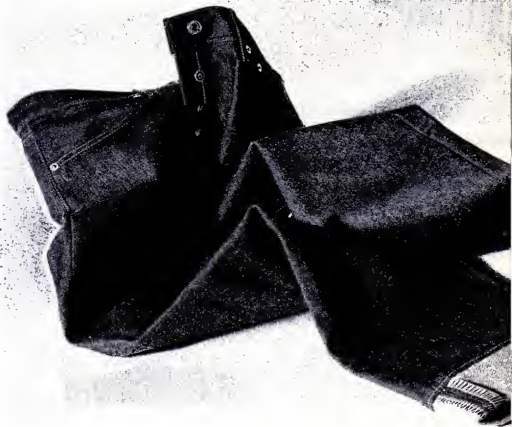
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ON THE COVER: Lauryn Hill exclusively photographed by Enrique Badulescu; makeup by Roxanne for Zoli; illustrations: hair by Furqan M. Pitcher for Brianella Power; jewelry: vintage dress by Vivian Pillat Gattler



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ON THE COVER: Wyclef Jean exclusively photographed by Walter Chin; styling by Emil Wittekin; grooming by Barry M. White for Zoli; hair by Veronica M. Fletcher for Shanelle Powell Agency; dark denim jacket and 201XX jeans, both by Levi's Vintage Clothing Line; white mesh T-shirt by Helmut Lang Underwear; shoes by Lugz; vintage cowboy hat; guitar by Fender Strat

ABOVE: Chocolate brown car coat, white viscose T-shirt, and black flatfront wide-leg pants, all by Emporio Armani; sneakers by Nike, hat by Kangol. SEE THE DETAILS

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If you're HIV+,

Being HIV+ isn't easy.

It's a daily challenge that can take all you've got. It helps to have an advantage — to lighten your load and keep you going. Federal healthcare guidelines now call for including a potent protease inhibitor as part of combination treatments to fight HIV. Consider these reasons to make the protease inhibitor CRIXIVAN the foundation of your treatment regimen. CRIXIVAN is a protease inhibitor that fights HIV. CRIXIVAN can help reduce the chance of illnesses and death associated with HIV. CRIXIVAN can also help lower the amount of HIV in your body (called "viral load") and raise your CD4 (T) cell count. Some patients may not experience these effects. CRIXIVAN is not a cure for HIV or AIDS.

New NIH research showed people taking CRIXIVAN in triple therapy lived longer and experienced fewer opportunistic infections.

Recent year-long research conducted by the National Institutes of Health (Protocol ACTG 320) studied over 1,000 patients and confirmed results from another study.

The group of patients receiving CRIXIVAN along with 3TC and AZT achieved a reduction in deaths and AIDS-defining illnesses over those taking 3TC and AZT alone.

This reduction was significant enough for the NIH to recommend the study be stopped, so that all participants could benefit from the findings. Because the study was ended early, there was insufficient data to determine the statistical impact of CRIXIVAN on survival.

CRIXIVAN in triple therapy continues to hold serum viral load down below the limit of detection at the one year mark.

In a separate, ongoing landmark study, over 90% of the 31 patients receiving CRIXIVAN, AZT, and 3TC reduced their HIV serum viral load below the limit of detection after 24 weeks (as measured by available tests; the virus may still be present in other organ systems).

Importantly, the limited number of patients who chose to stay with the study for longer periods of time maintained these results through the one year mark.

CRIXIVAN is generally well tolerated.

CRIXIVAN can be taken with a light meal or on an empty stomach. There are side effects associated with protease inhibitors in general and CRIXIVAN in particular. Some patients treated with CRIXIVAN may develop kidney stones. For some, this can lead to more severe kidney problems, including kidney failure. Drinking at least 6 glasses of water each day may help reduce the chance of forming a kidney stone. Other side effects reported include rapid breakdown of red blood cells and liver problems. There are some common medications and AIDS-related medications you should not take with CRIXIVAN. Discuss all medications you are taking or plan to take with your doctor.

As with other protease inhibitors, increased bleeding in some patients with hemophilia and increased blood sugar levels or diabetes have been reported. Please read the following page for detailed information on side effects and dosing.

CRIXIVAN may help you live a longer, healthier life.



CRIXIVAN is the number one choice of doctors.*

CRIXIVAN is prescribed for more patients than any other protease inhibitor. With this commitment to CRIXIVAN comes a commitment to product improvements and further research in the battle against HIV. CRIXIVAN is being studied in a broad range of patients and in many different combinations. Ask your doctor for the latest news and developments.

* IMS America; 3/96 - 2/98.

Focus on the rest of your life.

Learn all you can about HIV therapy. Talk with your doctor. Stay informed and stay the course. With viral load below the limit of detection and an increase in CD4 T-cells, it's easier to look forward to the future with confidence.

Please read the following page for more detailed information about CRIXIVAN.

**Remember to
ask your doctor
about CRIXIVAN.**

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Please read this information before you start taking CRIXIVAN. Also, you should read the information included with CRIXIVAN each time you receive your prescription, just in case anything has changed. Remember, this information does not take the place of careful discussions with your doctor. You and your doctor should discuss CRIXIVAN when you start taking your medication and at regular checkups. You should remain under a doctor's care when using CRIXIVAN and should not change or stop treatment without first talking with your doctor.

What is CRIXIVAN?

CRIXIVAN is an oral capsule used for the treatment of HIV (human immunodeficiency virus). HIV is the virus that causes AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome). CRIXIVAN is a type of HIV drug called a protease (PPO-1ee-ase) inhibitor.

How does CRIXIVAN work?

CRIXIVAN is a protease inhibitor that fights HIV. CRIXIVAN can help reduce your chances of getting illnesses associated with HIV. CRIXIVAN can also help lower the amount of HIV in your body (called "viral load") and raise your CD4 (T) cell count. CRIXIVAN may not have these effects in all patients.

CRIXIVAN is usually prescribed with other anti-HIV drugs such as AZV (also called AZT), 3TC, ddI, ddC, or d4T. CRIXIVAN works differently from these other anti-HIV drugs. Talk with your doctor about how you should take CRIXIVAN.

CRIXIVAN has been studied in adults. The safety and effectiveness of CRIXIVAN in children and adolescents has not been established.

How should I take CRIXIVAN?

There are six important things you must do to help you benefit from CRIXIVAN:

1. Take CRIXIVAN capsules every day as prescribed by your doctor. Continue taking CRIXIVAN unless your doctor tells you to stop. Take the exact amount of CRIXIVAN that your doctor tells you to take, right from the very start. To help make sure you will benefit from CRIXIVAN, you must not skip doses or take "drug holidays." If you do not take CRIXIVAN as prescribed, the activity of CRIXIVAN may be reduced (due to resistance).

2. Take CRIXIVAN capsules every 8 hours around the clock, every day. It may be easier to remember to take CRIXIVAN if you take it at the same time every day. If you have questions about when to take CRIXIVAN, your doctor or health care provider can help you decide what schedule works for you.

3. If you miss a dose by more than 2 hours, wait and then take the next dose at the regularly scheduled time. However, if you miss a dose by less than 2 hours, take your missed dose immediately. Then take your next dose at the regularly scheduled time. Do not take more or less than your prescribed dose of CRIXIVAN at any one time.

4. Take CRIXIVAN with water. You can also take CRIXIVAN with other beverages such as skim or low-fat milk, juice, coffee, or tea.

5. Ideally, take each dose of CRIXIVAN without food but with water at least one hour before or two hours after a meal. Or you can take CRIXIVAN with a light meal. Examples of light meals include:

- dry toast with jelly, juice, and coffee (with skim or low-fat milk and sugar if you want)
- corn flakes with skim or low-fat milk and sugar

Do not take CRIXIVAN at the same time as any meals that are high in calories, fat, and protein (for example — a bacon and egg breakfast). When taken at the same time as CRIXIVAN, these foods can interfere with CRIXIVAN being absorbed into your bloodstream and may lessen its effect.

6. It is critical that you drink at least six 8-ounce glasses of liquid (preferably water) throughout the day, every day. CRIXIVAN can cause kidney stones. Having enough fluids in your body should help reduce the chances of forming a kidney stone. Call your doctor or other health care provider if you develop kidney pain (middle to lower stomach or back pain) or blood in the urine.

Does CRIXIVAN cure HIV or AIDS?

CRIXIVAN is not a cure for HIV or AIDS. People taking CRIXIVAN may still develop infections or other conditions associated with HIV. Because of this, it is very important for you to remain under the care of a doctor. Although CRIXIVAN is not a cure for HIV or AIDS, CRIXIVAN can help reduce your chances of getting illnesses, including death, associated with HIV. CRIXIVAN may not have these effects in all patients.

Does CRIXIVAN reduce the risk of passing HIV to others?

CRIXIVAN has not been shown to reduce the risk of passing HIV to others through sexual contact or blood contamination.

Who should not take CRIXIVAN?

Do not take CRIXIVAN if you have had a serious allergic reaction to CRIXIVAN or any of its components.

What other medical problems or conditions should I discuss with my doctor?

Talk to your doctor if:

- You are pregnant or if you become pregnant while you are taking CRIXIVAN. We do not yet know how CRIXIVAN affects pregnant women or their developing babies.
- You are breast-feeding. You should stop breast-feeding if you are taking CRIXIVAN.

Also talk to your doctor if you have:

- Problems with your liver, especially if you have mild or moderate liver disease caused by cirrhosis.
- Problems with your kidneys.
- Diabetes
- Hemophilia

Tell your doctor about any medicines you are taking or plan to take, including non-prescription medicines.

This medication is prescribed for a particular condition. Do not use it for any other condition or give it to anybody else. Keep CRIXIVAN and all medicines out of the reach of children. If you suspect that more than the prescribed dose of this medicine has been taken, contact your local poison control center or emergency room immediately.

This provides a summary of information about CRIXIVAN. If you have any questions or concerns about CRIXIVAN or HIV talk to your doctor.

Can CRIXIVAN be taken with other medications?*

Drugs you should not take with CRIXIVAN:

SELDANE® (terfenadine) HCGANAL® (atenolol)

VERSEP® (moxidectin) HALCION® (triazolam)

PROFALSO® (caspofungin) Ergot medications (e.g., Wygrane® and Cafegrog®)

Taking CRIXIVAN with the above medications could result in serious or life-threatening problems (such as irregular heartbeat or excessive sleepiness).

In addition, you should not take CRIXIVAN with rifampin, known as RIFADIN®, RIFAMATE®, RIFATER®, or RIFACTINE®.

Drugs you can take with CRIXIVAN include:

RETROVIR® (zidovudine, ZDV also called AZT)

BIAVIN® (clonitromycin)

TAGAMET® (cimetidine)

isonaid (INH)

DRUGLON® (fluparone)

ORTHO-NOVUM 1/35® (oral contraceptive)

EPIVIR® (lamivudine, 3TC)

ZENIT® (stavudine, d4T)

BACTRIM®/SUPTIMA® (sulfamethoxazole/trisulfamethiazole)

VOEX® (didanosine, ddI) — If you take CRIXIVAN with VOEX®, take them at least one hour apart.

MYCOBUTIN® (rifabutin) — If you take CRIXIVAN with MYCOBUTIN®, your doctor may adjust both the dose of MYCOBUTIN and the dose of CRIXIVAN.

NEORAL® (tacrolimus) — If you take CRIXIVAN with NEORAL®, your doctor may adjust the dose of CRIXIVAN.

Talk to your doctor about all medications you are taking.

What are the possible side effects of CRIXIVAN?

Like all prescription drugs, CRIXIVAN can cause side effects. The following is not a complete list of side effects reported with CRIXIVAN when taken either alone or with other anti-HIV drugs. Do not rely on this page alone for information about side effects. Your doctor can discuss with you a more complete list of side effects.

Some patients treated with CRIXIVAN developed kidney stones, in some of these patients this led to more severe kidney problems, including kidney failure or inflammation of the kidneys. Drinking at least six 8-ounce glasses of liquid (preferably water) each day should help reduce the chances of forming a kidney stone. Call your doctor or other health care provider if you develop kidney pain (middle to lower stomach or back pain) or blood in the urine.

Some patients treated with CRIXIVAN have had rapid breakdown of red blood cells (hemolytic anemia) which in some cases was severe or resulted in death.

Some patients treated with CRIXIVAN have had liver problems including liver failure and death. Some patients had other illnesses or were taking other drugs. It is uncertain if CRIXIVAN caused these liver problems.

Diabetes and high blood sugar (hyperglycemia) have occurred in patients taking protease inhibitors. In some of these patients, this led to ketoacidosis, a serious condition caused by poorly controlled blood sugar. Some patients had diabetes before starting protease inhibitors, others did not. Some patients required adjustments to their diabetes medication. Others needed new diabetes medication.

In some patients with hemophilia, increased bleeding has been reported.

Clinical Studies

Increase in creatinine (one laboratory test of liver function) has been reported in approximately 10% of patients. Usually, this finding has not been associated with liver problems. However, on rare occasions, a person may develop yellowing of the skin and/or eyes.

Side effects occurring in 2% or more of patients included abdominal pain, fatigue or weakness, nose pain, feeling unwell, nausea, dizziness, vomiting, acid regurgitation, loss of appetite, dry mouth, back pain, headache, trouble sleeping, dizziness, taste changes, rash, upper respiratory infection, dry skin, and sore throat.

Swollen glands due to blocked urine flow occurred rarely.

Marketing Experience

Other side effects reported since CRIXIVAN has been marketed include: abdominal swelling; inflammation of the kidneys; increased fat appearing in areas such as the neck, abdomen, and back; change in skin color; severe skin reactions; hair loss; crystals in the urine; and allergic reactions.

Tell your doctor promptly about any of any other unusual symptoms. If the condition persists or worsens, seek medical attention.

How should I store CRIXIVAN capsules?

• Keep CRIXIVAN capsules in the bottle they came in and at room temperature (59°F–86°F).

• Keep CRIXIVAN capsules dry by leaving the small desiccant "pillow" in the bottle. Keep the bottle closed.



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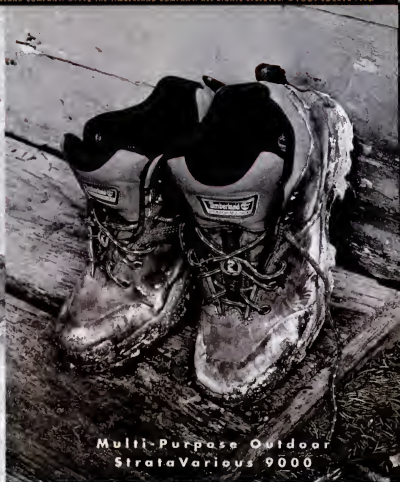
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THE GUEST LIST



CRÉDITS
 It wasn't until kris ex was threatened with the prospect of being thrown out of college that he discovered his calling. "I was caught up in some stuff and decided to write a letter explaining my side of the story," kris recalls. "The responses I got let me know I could write my ass off." This Brooklyn scribe—whose work also appears in ego trip—notches up his first VIBE cover story this month ("Playa Haitian," page 74). He enjoyed building with Wycheif, a fellow Haitian, but says it's all about the joy of putting pen to paper. "I'll write about a roach, a coffee mug, or any inanimate object—I don't care. As long as I can write, I'm straight."

Marc Baptiste's first photo subject was his high school girlfriend. That was 17 years ago, but Marc still has a great appreciation for the ladies. Check out his erotic shots of Sonya Blade (page 65) and Rosario Dawson (page 138). "I wanted to capture their sensuality and true beauty," says Marc, who's shot for Essence, Rolling Stone, Trace, Us, and Seventeen, as well as doing various book and album covers. (But he swears this really staid stuff for VIBE.) "There's no such thing as too sexy," he muses. "Confidence and pure sensuality are sexy; low self-esteem is very unsexy." Marc lives in Brooklyn with his very confident wife and twin girls.

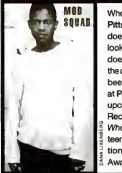


BONZ
 Bonz Malone, VIBE's resident consigliere, has been down with the home team since the magazine's conception five years ago. Seems that Q knew he couldn't start a music publication without putting Bonz on. The rest is history, and Bonz keeps makin' it. This year, he and his associates at Offline Entertainment won the Cannes Film Festival's Camera d'Or award for best first feature and the Cannes Jury Prize at the Sundance dance film festival for SLAM, a movie he cowrote and costarred in (page 58). "Winning was like becoming a made man," says Bonz, who writes the Tuff Street column every month.

Piotr Sikora cut short a corporate career at 25 so he could start over from scratch. "I promised myself the next job I'd love. I waited tables and assisted a photographer. I knew I wanted to do photography," says Sikora, 31, who's responsible for the sumo-style images of Fat Joe and Big Pun (page 108), the "Flicks" (page 128), and Puff's 5 Hitmen (page 112) in this issue. In just five and half years, Sikora has shot 12 magazine covers and several CD covers, and directed music videos. "I try to capture human emotion, and I'm happy if my photos can make you stop for just a minute."



IN-HOUSE COUNSEL



MOD SQUAD
 Who's the man? It's gotta be VIBE photo editor George "GP" Pitts. He's been running our photo department since 1993. GP does it all; but most importantly, he creates VIBE's signature look. "We marry passion with intellect," says GP. "If a photo doesn't have flavor, intensity, and compassion, then it's not the one." GP also writes articles for aPuff and parts his work to been exhibited in select Manhattan galleries. He has taught at Parsons School of Design and wrote the afterword for the upcoming art book Obsessions (Edition Sternheim), due this fall. Recent honors include being listed in the 1995-1996 Who's Who Among African Americans and American Photo's "Fifteen Music Power Brokers in Photography." Under his direction, VIBE has been nominated for two National Magazine Awards for Excellence in Photography.



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VIRGINIA SLIMS

"There aren't many kids with a big Afro in temple, you know? And the yarmulke was very difficult to maintain on my head."

—Lenny Kravitz on the travails of attending Hebrew school. ("When [Woody Allen's] ready for a dreadlocked black Jew, I'm there.") (Harper's Bazaar)

"If you wore one [pants] leg up and one down, that was very sporty, especially if you wore your cap cocked at a special angle or with the visor flipped up or turned around to the back."

—Count Basie, circa 1920, on rebel styles, from his autobiography *Good Morning Blues* (Da Capo, 1995). It seems that L.L. Cool J's favorite look is older than he ever knew.

"I don't get into my own sexual experience."

—Miss America Kate Shindle, 21, replying to a student's question at Jefferson Davis High School in Montgomery, Alabama, during Shindle's lecture on safe sex. The comment was met with boos. (People)

editor's choice

"That's all you got. You got love, and you got death. Death will find you.... It's up to you to find love.... That's 'cause love cost. Love got a price to it. Everybody don't want to pay."

—Holloway in August Wilson's 1990 *Two Trains Running*.

Word is bond

"I love Lil' Kim. I'll knock her religiously."

—Queen Latifah on her rumored beef with Lil' Kim. (WQHT, Hot 97 FM)

"I can be a delicious lunch, dinner, or breakfast, if you're weird...I am a mouth's best friend. I make you say 'Yum, yum.'"

—Monica Lewinsky, circa 1983, from her poem "I Am a Pizza." "A fine piece of work for a nine year old," says Tom Beller, coeditor of *Open City*, the magazine that published the verse. (George)

"Yum, yum."

—Suge Knight on what he thinks of Sean "Puffy" Combs. ("The boy likes to be seen too much.... I watch BET. I see his ass all the time.") (Newsweek)

[Puffy] always running in his videos? What's he scared of?"

—Suge Knight on what he thinks of Sean "Puffy" Combs. ("The boy likes to be seen too much.... I watch BET. I see his ass all the time.") (Newsweek)

"Why get on a boat when

I could get on a plane? Besides, I saw *Titanic*....

There were no black people on there."

—Chris Rock on why he won't be aboard the *Titanic* replica set to sail from Southampton, England to New York City in 2002. (People)

"I just want to know one thing: Why is that fool [Puffy] always running in his videos? What's he scared of?"

from the
VIDE VOULT

AUGUST 1997

"Wyclef is alternately hallucinogenic, abstract, and facetious, slipping into a quirky mad scientist role with unnerving ease."

—Kris Ex on Wyclef Jean's step up as a solo vocalist, king of pop comers, and master producer.



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A SOLDIER'S STORY

Master P's amazing ["American Gothic," by Rob Marriott, May]! He started with nothing, was playa-hated by many, and still got paid. P is like Teflon: Negativity just won't stick.

*MLM
Detroit, MI*

The No Limit soldiers shouldn't be pumping that gangsta bull. Not every G is going through hell, popping panties, or drinking and smok-

"Master P and his crew seem out of touch with reality. What other recording artists sit outside their label offices with loaded weapons waiting for an attack? They all need psychological help."

ing their problems away. Creating a multimillion-dollar black-owned enterprise out of a little business is great, but glamorizing guns and ghetto life does us no good. It's black exploitation. Master P, Puff Daddy, and Lil' Kim are modern-day slaves to the almighty dollar.

*Terrick T. Wilson
St. Louis, MO*

Master P and his crew seem out of touch with reality. What other recording artists sit outside their label offices with loaded weapons waiting for an attack? They all need psychological help. It's just a record label, not a damn gang—or cult. And why would his crew say they don't care if the FBI investigates? Something strange must be up if they have to guard their building late at night with loaded guns.

*Jamae
(via e-mail)
Evanston, IL*

Why would you put Master P and his No Limit crew on the cover? Master P's a good producer and businessman, but he and his crew need to retire from the mike. They're wack; their music isn't real hip hop. Why don't you feature cats who know what hip hop's all about, like Wu-Tang Clan or Busta Rhymes?

*Will Evans
Kansas City, KS
(Editor's note: Read up! We've featured the Wu and Busta on the covers of our September 1997 and February 1998 issues, respectively.)*

Master P keeps it real and still gets respect from Hollywood, corporate America, and the rap industry. You no bad for a southern hustler. You go, P!

*Andrea M. Wright
Houston, TX*

Instead of building a new No Limit headquarters, Master P should have built a communi-

ty center where kids can get computer skills, counseling, and health care to prepare them for the 21st Century. No Limit wouldn't exist if it weren't for the children.

*Dhavi Banks
Clarkston, GA*

I have a new respect for Master P and the No Limit soldiers. Many people don't believe in their dreams, and that's why they don't come true. Master P had a vision, made a plan, and followed through. Just as Mystikal says, they keeps rollin'!

*Tracee "Brown Sugar" Watson
(via e-mail)
Daleville, AL*

RAYE OF LIGHT

I loved your article on LisaRaye ["Pretty Woman," by Paul Young, May]. She's talented, beautiful, and she blew up the spot in *The Players Club*—without coming across like a video

ho. She's about to give Jada Pinkett, Lela Rochon, and Vivica A. Fox a run for their money.

*Craig D. Williams
(via e-mail)
Covina, CA*

DON'T WANNA BE A PLAYER

I'm glad K-Ci and JoJo have changed their image ["Second Coming," by Alan Light, May]. I always knew they weren't thugs. Finally, they've done some soul searching and realized that they don't have to sing about sex and act freaky in their videos to sell records. If they continue to record songs like "All My Life,"

they'll *always* be the bomb.

*Cathy Canale
Forestville, MD*



YOUR BEST SHOT

RICHARD GREEN, KEW GARDENS, NEW YORK

It's rare you find artists as down-to-earth as K-Ci and JoJo. It's good to see that they're not too busy to sing in the choir and share home-cooked meals with family and friends. I'm proud these brothers haven't forgotten their roots.

*LaSonja and Carolyn
Choochilla, CA*

BELOVED

I loved the VIBE Q with Toni Morrison [by Robert Morales, May], and the photographs of her were beautiful! Stories like this keep hip hop kids engrossed and educated. Someday I'd like to see a cover story on Ms. Morrison. She represents the incredible literary contributions made by minorities, past and present.

*Tarron D. White
Tennessee Colony, TX*

NAKED AMBITION

It's great that you featured Coco Chanel [The *Stylist*, May]—but how many people out there can actually afford its designs? People try to be ghetto fabulous and buy clothes they can't afford, but most of them don't own anything except the clothes on their back. That's pathetic.

*Theresa Wells
Boca Raton, FL*

BOOGIE NIGHTS

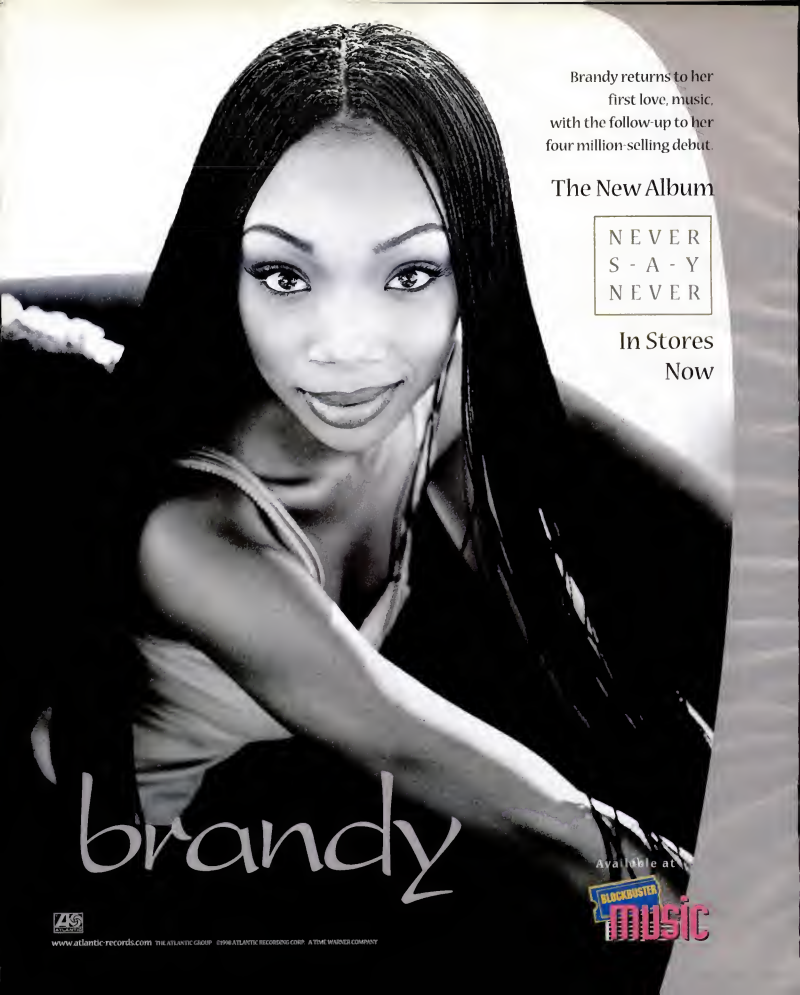
I'm totally feeling Danyel Smith ["Everybody Dance

Now," Start, May]. Dancing and hip hop are codpendent: We can't have one without the other. A rap song isn't weak just because its only purpose is to make people dance. I go to clubs to dance and sweat, not to mack and play Big Willie. If I don't sweat, I want my money back. Big up to Wyclef and those other dancing fools. And Ms. Smith, I'll see you on the dance floor.

*Todd James
Corona, NY*

KICKING KNOWLEDGE

I appreciate the article "Ancient History" [by Bönz Malone, Start, May]. There are a lot of hip hop heads out there who don't understand the true



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essence of Shao Lin. They peep kung fu flicks and pump the latest Wu-Tang theme without actually knowing the history of the words and symbols they hear and see. Props to Mr. Shi Yan Ming for being a true educator. He is cool and wise. Also, respect to VIBE for introducing different cultures to young heads who might not otherwise see outside their own 'hoods. Keep it up and keep it real.

J. "L.B. Pat" Patterson
Brooklyn, NY

MAD CAPPA

How can you *dis* The Pillage [Revolutions, by Chairman Mao, May]? Cappadonna's rhymes and style are hot. Just because you don't understand the Wu's lyrics doesn't make them sloppy, unregulated, and unfocused. They're insightful, real, and raw. At least Cappa and the rest of the Wu are keeping it real. They don't have to rap about stupid things like how much cash they make or how they "don't understand the language of people with short money." What skills do these simple-minded lyrics demonstrate? Cappa and the Wu family are true prophets, and I wish they could preach forever.

Sara "QJ" Zavala
Staten Island/Shao Lin, NY

"Congratulations to VIBE for representing on a global level. It's one more thing that makes this magazine different from the rest."

I usually have no idea what any Wu-Tang members are saying in their lyrics. I often find myself wondering what the hell they're talking about. I thought I was the only one until I read the Cappadonna review. Obviously, I'm not alone in my confusion.

Dave
Charleston, SC

Cappadonna's rhymes do make sense. He's a prolific mike maner who pours his soul into every line. *The Pillage* gives fans a look into his life. "Donna is dope. Why do so many resist the stinging of his venom?"

A. "Sly Stallone" Badman
Berkeley, CA

People need to give Wu-Tang their props. They are second to none. To all hats, I say: Kiss my Killer Bee stinger!

Marcos
Columbia, SC

LET IT SNOW

I asked my husband question 18 of 20 Questions [May]: "Why is it snowing in SWV's video for 'Rain'?" His answer: "Snow is frozen rain." Keep those 20 Questions coming because they're mad funny!

LaShonda Bates
Fort Polk, LA

SIP O' BRANDY

Brandy's taught me how to expand my future as the ultimate movie entertainer, and I want to do that eventually. She's shown me that it can happen. I think I'll start by getting into television. I might even go back to *Moesha*.

Uber Raymond
Atlanta, GA

All together now: "Brandy is boring as shit!"

Slam Jim
Chesapeake, VA

Brandy has feelings like everybody else. It's not fair that people criticize her every action. People seem to hate her when she's simply sharing her talents. What we need to do is stop playa-hating and congratulate Brandy on a job well done.

Melba T. Tate
Memphis, TN

People don't play-hate Brandy because she's successful. It's her attitude. Her arrogance overshadows her good qualities.

Leon Laing
Harrisburg, PA

Sonja Norwood seems selfish and controlling, and Brandy seems to be living her life to please her mother. When Brandy realizes she's being manipulated, let her hope she doesn't rebel and end up miserable like Janet Jackson or Gary Coleman.

Nikki Leak
Winston-Salem, NC

LATIN LIBERATION

I'm proud of Marc Anthony's mission to lift the blanket that's shielded Latino culture, language, and music ["Fuego Fuego," by Amy Linden, April]. He's a true *salsero* and *jibarito* at heart.

David M. Lopez
Comstock, NY

Thank you for your features on Latinos like Marc Anthony, Freddie Prince, and Big Pun. And the long-overdue El Ritmo column is the shit. (Good looking out on the Latin house music artists, the Vargas Brothers.) You are one of the few music magazines aware of the Latino presence on both coasts. Continue to represent.

J.A. Reyes
Los Angeles, CA

Marc Anthony is very talented—I love his work. His music is proof that every culture is unique and beautiful. Whether it's Latin music, reggae, calypso, or rock, we should be able to embrace it and remember how valuable music is to our lives. Congratulations for representing on a global level. It's one more thing that makes this magazine different from the rest.

Leonora L. Brown
(via e-mail)
Wilmington, DE

WALK ON BY

Dionne Warwick didn't have to be ignorant just to get her point across ["Psychic Enemy," by Cristina Verán, April]. I don't agree with all the crap that rappers say in their lyrics, but I do believe in freedom of speech. Rap will always be a major force in the music industry whether Ms. Warwick approves of the lyrics or not.

Presley L. Douglas
Olympia, WA

Dionne Warwick's stretching out one hand for respect while handing out disrespect with the other. She totally tore down Snoop Doggy Dogg and Suge Knight. It was a perfect case of the pot calling the kettle black.

Krystal L. Phillips
(via e-mail)
Springfield, OH

NOTHING BUT LOVE

I was feeling your feature on Stone Love, one of Jam-down's finest sound systems [VIBEStyle, April]. Stone Love set the pace for dancehall sound systems, and although they switched from clashing to strictly juggling, they still have a large following in the dancehall music circuit.

Talifur Sadiq Soldier
Comstock, NY

FEEL THE FIRE

Peter Allen [Mail, April] is wrong to say that Foxy Brown and Lil' Kim perpetuate stereotypes detrimental to the

black community. Didn't Marvin Gaye seductively say, "Let's Get It On"? And didn't Teddy Pendergrass command, "Close the Door"? Sexual references have always been relevant to black music—just ask Millie Jackson. Bad parents shouldn't use Foxy Brown, Lil' Kim, Allen Iverson, or Master P as their scapegoats. Lil' Kim's songs and Allen Iverson's antics are actually very valuable conversation pieces that keep communication flowing between the generations.

Keith Barber
Ripley, TN

SHE GOT GAME

Rudolph Churchill is just one of the many people who want to blame everything that's wrong with today's youth on his hip culture [Mail, April]. He had no right to judge Iverson's mother because he doesn't know what she's been through. What's important is that she supported her son and his talent as best she could, and now her baby plays in the NBA.

Erinn S. Ervin
Charlotte, NC

Why should Allen Iverson stop hanging with his boys just because he's making a little loot now? They may get into trouble once in a while, but I'm sure he has a positive impact on them.

Lord Shamel
Belleville, PA

CORRECTION

•Regarding "Vaya Mi Gente" (page 160 of the June/July issue), Automatic Productions is in fact the producer of *A&E's Live by Request*.

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M.O.A. NO. 4

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calculus

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Critics agree. "Buddy Lee, Man of Action" is some of Buddy's best work.



THIS IS A MAP OF MISSOURI.

They say Buddy Lee has a backbone the size of Missouri. We're pretty sure they mean the actual state though. Which is even bigger than the map.

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Genuine **Lee** Durable
DUNGAREES
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START MILLI VANILLI DIED FOR YOUR SINS

It's no surprise the fatal overdose of Rob Pilatus, 32, this April 5 wasn't followed by tales of assisted suicide, conspiratorial murder, or a faked death rewarding him a plush new life in Bali. As a member of Milli Vanilli—Turkish, by the way, for “positive energy”—he had long dropped from the public's roster of the rumor-worthy. Exposed as dreaded lip-synchers in 1990, Pilatus and his cohort, Fabrice Morvan, had spent much of the '90s as pathetic objects of scorn. That is, until VH-1 devoted a *Behind the Music* documentary to them last year. The extraordinary, hour-long episode gave us a Milli Vanilli with tremendous cautionary value: Two hapless wannabes were readily mistipulated into pure, empty pop icons—in short, the true fathers of modern hip-hop.

Consider: Milli Vanilli's scandal wasn't so much that they were hired to be pretty boys fronting for the voices of mediocre session singers. Their crime was that they were given a Grammy for it—the one genuinely passive moment of their career. There was a time when black performers in this country had to wear blackface in front of audiences to pass for white; when gay performers had to pass for straight (some still do); when celebrities and politicians needed to pretend to write their own memoirs. So fronting is simply an element of performing, right? It was the Grammy's fronting for the recording industry's flagrant defilement of shit like “Girl You Know It's True,” though, that was the real scandal. Arista signed Pilatus and Morvan as fall guys. And when they were crucified like

two thieves, there was a conspicuous absence of a third cross between them.

Their thankless sacrifice hasn't been in vain. Today, no one would say that brilliantly lip-synching the tepid but catchy words of others—a time-honored skill in drag clubs—is any less noble than ineptly lip-synching one's own DAT-preserved, marble-mouthed mumbblings onstage. Today, you don't have to reference your samples with any artistry—a mere checkbook will afford you the wholesale plunder of music history. So all you aspiring plays/CEOs looking to karaoke an '80s radio hit into a heartfelt tribute, relax: Thanks to the brave, groundbreaking effort of Milli Vanilli, you needn't ever worry about returning your Grammy. *Robert Morales*



ILLUSTRATION BY AIMEE CAJENECIA



India-tripping

America's mainstream is flooded with gifts from the Ganges

START

In 1986, a sexy Bombay girl named Alisha became India's hottest "rock star" when she put on a lacy bustier and sang Madonna-like songs such as "Papa Don't Preach (I'm Dating a Boy)." This year, the ex-Maternal Girl returned the compliment, singing "Shanti/Ashangi," a Hindu Sanskrit prayer, on her 13th album, *Ray of Light* (Warner Bros.). In fact, the American public's recent fascination with all things Indian has the distance between New York clubs and New Delhi discos feeling shorter than ever.

"Course, in the '60s, the Beatles went on a magical mysticism tour of India's ashrams and put the soothing strings of a sitar into the classic folk song "Norwegian Wood (This Bird Has Flown)" (1965). Thirty-two years later, Tjinder Singh, the English-Indian leader of the band Cornershop, took the sitar back, recutting "Norwegian Wood" in Hindi for *When I Was Born for the 7th Time* (Luaka Bop/Warner Bros.), a clever weave of traditional Indian instrumentation, hip hop beats, and rock that had the nation's

music critics going gaga for ragas. Opening for the Beastie Boys' 1994 *Ill Communication* tour, Punjabi by Nature brought *bhangra*-Punjabi folk music from North India meshed with hip hop and reggae to stadium stages across the globe. Recently, Tommy Boy Records jumped into the masala mix, signing a deal to distribute the heady mix of hip hop, dub, ambient, flamenco, and classical Indian folk created by Nottingham, England's Outcaste Records.

"They call it 'Indian vibes,'" says Martin Davies, head of marketing at Tommy Boy. "Indian kids in the U.K. have a sound about their unique identity and history. I compare it to hip hop because it's lifestyleled. It's very close to a culture music movement."

Even nonmusical Indian rituals have



been getting worldwide exposure on MTV broadcasts. Such stars as Madonna, Erykah Badu, and the Artist have been painting themselves in the swirling, paisley patterns of *mehndi*. Originating in North Africa, *mehndi*'s reddish henna dye has covered the hands and feet of Indian brides-to-be and temple courtesans for centuries, representing fertility and the flushed skin tones that accompany sexual excitement.

It's hard not to notice also that certain small, sometimes sparsely markings have been popping up on the brows of pop stars of late. From No Doubt's jocko-skatstress Gwen Stefani to R&B soul sirens like Janet Jackson and Mary J. Blige, MTV royalty are wearing what's known as a *bindi*—a traditional symbol of marital devotion for a Hindu woman. But single Indian women

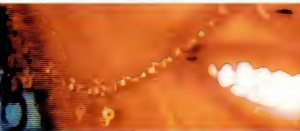
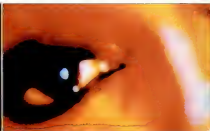
have been showing off *bindis*—chosen for beauty's sake, like lipstick—for years, and South Asian youth wear them as a symbol of pride. Some folks believe the marking to be the cooling hood for their invisible "third eye."

"The song is about getting into yourself spiritually," says Ms. Blige of her decision to don a *bindi* for her "Everything" clip. "I just sat down with the director and the stylist to come up with something to express that spirituality that was feeling."

Indian gear hasn't always been that fashionable. Less than 10 years ago, the self-named Dot Busters—a loose organization of white neo-facets upset about employment issues—terrorized south Asian communities in several New Jersey cities. Back then, wearing a *bindi* could get you beaten with a baseball bat. Today, though, America's pop-watchin' teeny-boppers rock sick-on-versions at the mall. Proving progress—at least, one would hope that's what it is—moves in a mysterious manner. *Kali Ma*

Additional reporting by Shelley Jefferson

Indian rituals have been getting worldwide exposure on MTV broadcasts



Chairman's Choice

A monthly guide to the best independent record releases from VIBE's resident connoisseur

With hip hop once again resorting to dance crazes, rap-rock fusions, and television themes, the dumb but fun bravado of '80s rap is back in all its visceral glory. On their first single, "The Projects" (4.5.14 Productions, 718-385-1927), Brooklyn unknowns the Dead present themselves as unrefined disciples of the aesthetic by localizing rap to its N.Y.C. roots. This guilty-pleasure metro theme amounts to a listing of every housing projects facility in the entire Rotten Apple, interspersed with Dead-head observations like, "We livin' in the lane that's fast / Not payin' / No light, no gas / When you hear those gunshots blast / Word, life, you better save your..." Make noise, B-boys. Somewhere Jerry Garcia is rolling in his grave.

Rough enough for a man, but still three times a lady, ex-BDP associate Heather B. returns from a jaw-cracking, dis-filled cameo on Rage's "The Set Up" with her own, equal-

6421). Revolution's even fresher "The Fresh-est (Remix)" is controlled chaos at its finest. The face-lift heaps loads of additional aural accents—precisely scratched hooks, extra-heavy bass hits, even whistles—over the original, minimalist recipe of sneaky strings and understated vocals that're as cool as Cyrus Chestnut. "Look for the album *Balance Beam* coming to a record mart near you.

Searching for a dedicated minister of underground sound? Like Survivor said, the search is over—DJ Spinna has been with you all along. The Brooklyn boardsman's production prowess powers the work of his own group, the Jigmastas, as well as a recent series of excellent, independent singles by the likes of I.G. Off & Hazardous, the N.O.T.S Click featuring Big L, Sir Menelik, and subterranean supergroup Polytronic Addicts (featuring Shabazz Sam, Mr. Complex, and Apani



Jailhouse Rap

Incarcerated Bay Area MC X-Raided writes rhymes while he counts days

Honestly, my life is about over. I'm not sad or being melodramatic; I've just accepted reality. Now I must find a way to pimp that sad reality. I was very fortunate to get my albums recorded [in here]. The chances of that happening again are slim... Hip hop is my life now. I'd have given up a long time ago if not for music. It is the fire that keeps my soul warm. Listening to it, writing it, and reading about it is what is keeping me alive.

Black Market artist Anarae "X-Raided" Brown writes poignant words from his cell at Salinas Valley State Prison, Soledad, California. The 24-year-old Sacramento native is serving his sixth year of a 31-year sentence there for the first-degree murder of an acquaintance's mother. He didn't pull the trigger, but he was charged along with the shooter.

Apparently, though, being behind bars hasn't hindered X-Raided's career. "I'm much more creative in here," he says. "I've got more time to sit down. I study a dictionary, define words, define topics. I watch the news constantly and read everything I can get my hands on."

In fact, the prolific rapper has written more than 40 songs during his prison stint—including this summer's "Mama's Pride and Joy," which takes a thoughtful look at the crimes of his past—and has even put several albums' worth of material to tape. In 1996, X's *X-Record*, recorded over the phone, sold 10,000 units—mostly on the West Coast—despite its poor audio quality. The recently released follow-up, *Speak of the Devil*, is culled from 65 tracks recorded onto a DAT, with beats added afterward at a studio. (According to Jerry Smith, community resources manager at Salinas, it's a mystery how such vocal sessions could take place. "Inmates are not allowed to have tape recorders," says Smith.)

X-Raided also shares writing credits on fellow Sacramento rapper C-Bo's *Til My Casket Drops* (AWOL/Noo Trybe, 1998). The pair penned three tunes together when they shared a cell in the Sacramento County Jail.

"Hip hop means so much more inside here," says X. "It can help you keep focused and vent your frustrations."

And frustrations have been running high at Salinas Valley State Prison. When no one came forward with information about a recent in-house infraction, the whole jail was put on lockdown. Nobody can use the phone or spend more than a couple of hours out of his cell until someone talks—leaving X-Raided with a lot of time to contemplate, and read, and write.

Billy Jam

START



Nice wood paneling! The Chemists in the Basement

ly antagonistic "Do You" (Hi-Rize Entertainment, 212-539-8891). Formerly signed to EMI, the Jersey girl put out an album, 1996's *Takin Mine*, that was unduly overlooked. This year, producer Kenny Parker (brother of Kris) constructs a tower of tension with pungent horn stabs and a nagging piano line, while champ MC Heather continues to wreak havoc on her more celebrated female counterpart: "Got your clock striking twelve / I'm bringing hell to Cinderella / Fuck how much you sell / Cause I read your album cover / You couldn't write a jam if your last name was Smucker." My vote is in. Heather B. is President.

Though their billing is the clumsiest to hit hip hop since Kwame the Boy Genius featuring a New Beginning (bleh), Los Angeles' Red Foo and Dre Kroon, featuring Evidence, Promise, and DJ Revolution, came through with one of this past writer's biggest indie hits, "The Freshest" (Bubonic Records, 310-915-

B. Fly Emcee). Spin's ability to harness ringing, space-age keyboard melodies makes him one of the most consistently rewarding talents on the contemporary underground hip hop scene.

Spinna's sometime production collaborator Joe Max has not only helped out on remixes for De La Soul and J-Live; he composes one half of the Kansas City, Kansas duo the Basement Chemists. On the group's fine debut, "Vibrate" (Beyond Real Recordings, 212-726-3687), Spinna's Fender-Rhodes resonance provides shimmering support for Joe's and partner Jay Lee's elegant rhyemology. The introspective flip, "Everybody (L.I.F.E.)," examines spiritual salvation over Joe's syncopated arrangement of snares, kicks, and piano melancholia. "Everybody on the streets should know," the BCs recite on the chorus, "The Devil's after your mind and after your soul / If you let him take it / Then you're never gonna make it." Now that's education.

Please send independent 12-inch wax to Chairman Mao, c/o VIBE, 215 Lexington Avenue, New York, NY 10016



Rebels Without a Logo

For some, Public Enemy's icon isn't quite on target

When Public Enemy released their soundtrack to Spike Lee's newest film, *He Got Game*, in April, a lot of elements familiar to longtime fans were in place. The voices of Chuck D, Flavor Flav, and Professor Griff; the cutting of DJ's Terminator X and Johnny Juice; the unique discord of the band's celebrated production unit, the Bomb Squad.

One key element of PE's identity, however, was completely missing. The trademark "target" symbol—that of a defiant B-boy locked in the crosshairs of a rifle scope—was nowhere to be found on the album artwork.

"We decided, from a corporate standpoint, that we had some problems with their logo," says Terry Curtin, senior vice president of publicity for Buena Vista Pictures Marketing, the Disney subsidiary whose Touchstone imprint released the movie. "It's a violent image," Curtin continues. "What we wanted to do was just remove the crosshairs."

PE founder and vocalist Chuck D calls the negotiations "the low point of the project" and says the company took the position that "unless we deleted the logo, we couldn't have any of the Disney artwork. Or Denzel [Washington]." The star's face dominates all of the film's promotional graphics.

"DefJam wasn't putting up anything toward marketing, so we decided to replace the target with Denzel." Chuck chuckles sardonically. "For the first time, maybe PE can get the elusive black female audience."

Meanwhile, the band continue to work on their next album, to be titled *There's a Poison Goin' On*. "A combination of Redman meets Pink Floyd," says Chuck, "meets Rage Against the Machine meets Chemical Brothers." It'll be out early next year. Just look for the friendly PE logo at a store near you.

Harry Allen

Harry Allen served as Public Enemy's publicist from March 1990 to October 1991.

SOUND CHECK

BOBBITO plays the tracks; GLORIA ESTEFAN states the facts

Q Straight up, Gloria Estefan is the bomb. Bona fide mad cool peeples. For 23 years now, the 40-year-old Havana native has kept it real as lead singer of Miami Sound Machine and as a solo artist. Dance hits. Love ballads. And No. 1 pop singles like 1991's "Coming Out of the Dark," which told the story of her recovery from a 1990 tour-bus accident. In '93, the comeback queen hit us with *Mi Tierra*, an all-Spanish album that exposed five million listeners to 'tyme Cuban music styles. Her new disco banger, *gloria!*, dropped in June on Epic Records. That's g-l-o-r-i-a.

•Dr. Buzzard's Original Savannah Band — "Hard Times" (RCA, 1976)

G.E.: Reminds me of the old Savannah Band. B: That's who it is.
G.E.: Hot stuff. We covered their song "Cherchez la Femme."

B: My sister used to run this record into the ground. I like the line, "Tired of roaches." It was cool that somebody was acknowledging roaches in music.

G.E.: They copped such a unique sound. Tom-

•Eddie Palmieri — "Azucar" (Tico Records, 1972)

G.E.: Sounds like Palmieri.

B: It is. Eddie Palmieri.

G.E.: I guessed that because the song's style is very jazzy, like Latin jazz.

B: Eddie made a couple of joints with a band called Harlem River Drive, a combination of African-American and Latino musicians and percussionists.

G.E.: They work so well together. One of our first songs was a mixture of Cuban conga rhythms, funky bass lines, and dance drums.

•Big Pun — "I'm Not a Player" (Loud Records, 1998)

G.E.: I wish I could say stuff like that in my songs, but if I did, my fans would freak! One time, in a *People* article, I said, Sht happens, and they printed "Blank blank happens." I got letters saying, "Why did you have to curse?" "Sht" is a bodily function, not a curse. Oh, they have some Spanish references in this song.

B: He's a Latino from the Bronx. This record's amusing to me because he's over four hun-



my Mottola managed them. He's done everything. He used to be T.D. Valentine, the recording artist. He's gonna kill me for telling you! Now he's CEO of Sony, the big cheese.

B: The biggest cheese.

•Yambu — "Sunny" (Montuno Records, 1975)

G.E.: The wahwah pedal in this song is back, big time. Is this File & Drum Corp.?

B: It's Yambu on Montuno Records. Let me play you the Spanish B-side "Caballo."

G.E.: That's so cool, because with the first record we ever did, *Live Again* (Almo Sound/Interscope, 1977), one side was in Spanish and the other was in English.

dred pounds and he's talking about having sex with lots of women. Maybe he does. I dunno, though....

G.E.: Maybe he's just fantasizing. If all art was autobiographical, we'd be in deep shit. What I love about rap is the openness of it, the uncensored, hardcore groove of it. There's so much cool shit coming out of Latin America—places like the Dominican Republic—hip hop mixed with merengue.

B: I heard there's a rap scene in Cuba too.

G.E.: The government can't be too happy about that because rap's definitely political. But pain creates good music. When you try to stifle expression in a pressure cooker, it's amazing—talent just explodes.



BANKER BY DAY.



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Lilith Fair Fantasy Mudwrestling

This summer, folk rocker Sarah McLachlan has pulled together more than 60 of the world's top female pop acts for the second annual Lilith Fair—57 concert dates of the biggest rotating lineup, traveling festival tour ever assembled. With a number of women-oriented charities dispensing literature, the message will be there. And of course, the music'll be great. But the real excitement will come during the nightly after-parties that have been arranged at local bars and gymnasiums in each city stop. There, amid the curses and catcalls of sweaty beer drinkers, the tour's headliners are set to engage in a hallowed feminist ritual: mudwrestling.

START MATCHUP: Indigo Girls (Any Ray and Emily Saliers) vs. Missy "Misdemeanor" Elliott



Indigo's Strengths: They've been to the doctor. They've been to the mountains. Tag-team strategy preserves energy and keeps opponents off guard.

Indigo's Weaknesses: Slathered in lubricant, grappling female hardbodies, Amy and Em tend to lose focus.



Missy's Strengths: Comes off the top rope like Jimmy "Superfly" Snuka.

Missy's Weaknesses: Can't stand the rain. Doesn't like mud so much either.

PREDICTED VICTOR: MISSY

Hint: 'em wit' da Ha. Hint: 'em wit' da Hee. Slams an elbow into Ray's larynx. Drives her knee into Saliers's chin.

MATCHUP: Lauryn Hill vs. Erykah Badu



Lauryn's Strengths: Lightning-quick jab. Indefensible right cross. Can rap and sing.

Lauryn's Weaknesses: Adversaries can strum her pain with their fingers.



Badu's Strengths: Trademark "Badu Back-breaker" devastating to opponents' spinal column. Hides brass knuckles in headwrap.

Badu's Weaknesses: Kinda mellow for a mudwrestler....

PREDICTED VICTOR: LILITH

The Fugee fighting machine will kill Badu...softly but, nevertheless, decisively.

MATCHUP: Sheryl Crow vs. Sinead O'Connell



Crow's Strengths: Through a rigorous pretour weight-training regimen (and, reportedly, heavy steroid usage), Crow has bulked up to 265 pounds of battle-ready muscle.

Crow's Weaknesses: According to song "If It Makes You Happy," Crow "still gets high." Wrestling is serious business. The mud pit is no place for impaired sense perception.



Sinead's Strengths: Piercing banshee wail can shatter opponents' eardrums. Master of the figure-four leglock.

Sinead's Weaknesses: Cried in "Nothing Compares 2 U" video—a sure sign of weakness.

PREDICTED VICTOR: IHH

God, still upset over that Pope thing on *Saturday Night Live*, will not let Sinead win anything.

MATCHUP: Queen Latifah vs. Sarah McLachlan



Latifah's Strengths: Packs heat.

Latifah's Weaknesses: Covered in mud, the Queen will lose some of her intimidating regal air.



McLachlan's Strengths: Held the IAFMW (International Association of Female Mudwrestling) belt from 1994 to 1997. Will scratch, pull hair, and cheat to win.

McLachlan's Weaknesses: Skin is not bulletproof. Will be wearing only a bikini.

PREDICTED VICTOR: LATIFAH

BLA-OW! BLA-OW! BLA-OW! Who you calling a bitch?!

VIPE confidential

EVERYTHING YOU WANT TO KNOW BEFORE YOU'RE SUPPOSED TO KNOW IT



Whates to say we told you so, but, just as we predicted, Mase and Brandy are officially "a couple." And her mom is pleased as punch. So how come, if she disapproved of squeaky-clean Boyz II Men—er Wanya being with her daughter, that the bad boy formerly known as Murder Mase is a righteous babe? According to a secret source close to the rapper: "Because Mase is young, cool, and cute, and Wanya is old and not." Well all righty, then.

Looks like *Titanic* director James Cameron has been sinking his ship in some uncharted waters. The repugnant ("I'm king of the world") Oscar winner has reportedly left his actress wife Linda Hamilton for actress girlfriend Suzy Amis. Hamilton, though, doesn't seem to be sweating it. A crane operator named Mike Deerheim told the *Daily Mirror*, a British tabloid, that "Linda Hamilton has stolen my wife!" Cindy Deerheim played Hamilton's stunt double in *Dante's Peak*. Double your pleasure, ladies!

Stuff we shoulda said last month: Hoops phenom Kobe Bryant signed a rap deal with Trackmasters Entertainment/Columbia Records? *True*. Jenny Lopez got her record deal with Columbia/Sony because she's having an affair with Sony CEO Tommy Mottola? *Not true*.

Now, what would this happy family of hip hop be without a healthy serving of grade-A beef? We know you love it, so here it is: **VC** recently heard an unreleased Foxy Brown song, "10% Dis (Remix)," in which Miss Thing spits a thinly veiled dis at Queen Latifah. "Mad 'cause I'm pretty," Foxy says. "Seent your fruity ass straight-staring at my ritties." Apparently, Latifah's friend and fellow rap matriarch Queen Pen heard the song too. During the Impactmusic convention in Nevada, Pen actually kicked her shoes off and stepped to Foxy in the lobby of the Reno Hilton. A fight was avoided thanks to the Good Samaritan intervention of rappers *Noreaga* and *Cam'ron*; however, later on, the two ladies bumped heads again. This time Foxy was accompanied by her "fiancé" Kurupt and his California goon squad. Luckily, it was again broken up before any punches were thrown. **VC's** only question is, How can Foxy claim superior MC skills when so many of her rhymes are penned by Jay-Z? Oops, did we say that?

But then again, this is all off the record, strictly on the Q.T., and of course, very *hush-hush*.



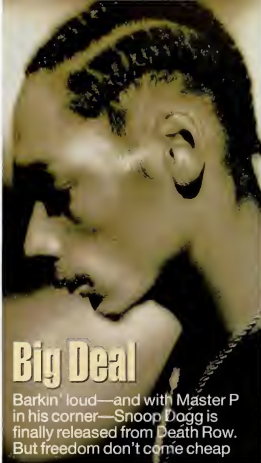
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Big Deal

Barkin' loud—and with Master P in his corner—Snoop Dogg is finally released from Death Row. But freedom don't come cheap

Multiplatinum recording artist Snoop Dogg has talked his way out of an iron-clad contract with floundering Death Row Records—right into a deal with the flourishing powerhouse No Limit Records.

"Basically, Snoop ran his mouth so much and burned so many bridges that he destroyed the chance that Death Row could ever successfully market him again," said a source close to Priority Records. "Something had to be worked out." Priority, recently acquired by EMI Records, distributes both Death Row and No Limit recordings—a situation that made Snoop's career move easier.

It took three months of negotiations between No Limit mastermind Master P and Death Row Records attorney David Kenner to finalize the transfer of Snoop's contract. The deal, though, was set in motion back in January, when Snoop began speaking out about life on Death Row. (The company has long maintained a "no comment" position with the press.) In a series of public outbursts, Snoop claimed he feared for his life, charged he'd been cheated out of earnings, and complained about the label's increasing disarray in the wake of problems ranging from Dr. Dre's defection to Tupac Shakur's assassination to Suge's incarceration to ongoing criminal investigations. Ignoring a contract that bound him to Death Row for six more albums, Snoop declared himself a free agent and began paying his bills by performing cameos with other artists like Mack 10 and Ice Cube, SWV, and Jermaine Dupri. Snoop even ditched the label in an unreleased song called "Death Row Killers."

All that talk—and Snoop's eventual freedom—

didn't come cheap. Besides an up-front payment from No Limit that a source close to the negotiation says is in the mid-six figures, Death Row will continue to receive revenue from the sales of Snoop's recordings. According to agents and attorneys who have extracted other artists from their contracts with Death Row, that money will probably be shaved off Snoop's royalty rate—perhaps as much as 20 or 30 percent. The status of Snoop's relationship with Suge Publishing, which has owned the rights to his songs until now, is unknown.

"I'll be making money for a long time off Snoop without the headaches, no matter where he goes," said the imprisoned Death Row owner, Suge Knight, to *Newswerk*.

Additionally, there seem to be some unresolved bad feelings connected to Snoop's leaving. On May 1, backstage at the Universal Amphitheater in Los Angeles, a half-dozen men, who several witnesses said were associated with Death Row, insulted and scuffled with the star after his surprise guest performance with cousin and current Death Row artist Daz Dillinger. "It wasn't much of a fight—mostly a lot of pushing and shoving. Although Snoop did get slapped," said a witness. "And it didn't last long at all. About forty members of No Limit security were there in a couple of seconds." A former associate of the Death Row camp ominously suggested that history proves it won't be easy for Snoop to sever his relationship with the label. "Did anybody else get out easy? With Dre, it was money. With Tupac, it was his life." But another witness familiar with both camps shrugged off extreme scenarios. "Death Row doesn't want any part of No Limit, not like this," he said. "If Death Row starts beef, none of its artists will be able to tour outside of southern California."

Ironically, when Los Angeles Sheriff deputies were alerted to the altercation, it was Snoop and Daz who were arrested—for possession of marijuana. "It looked like they were under the influence, so we detained them," said Sgt. Blaine Talmo of the L.A. Sheriff's Universal Studios substation. "They had had less than an ounce, which is an infraction on the order of a speeding ticket since California decriminalized marijuana."

These are apparently minor details to Snoop, who has considered this a done deal since he got started. In February, he bought a house in Baton Rouge to be closer to Master P's New Orleans-based operation, and Snoop spent the spring working on his first No Limit album, *Da Game Is to Be Sold, Not to Be Told*, set for release August 4. Instead, he has put a moratorium on comments to the press. For now anyway, Snoop is saving his rapping for the studio. *Dave Karger*

Blue-Light Special

Snoop isn't the first to get 'bout it and leave his label behind. Here are some other famous folk who have had their contracts bought out in the search for greener grass on the other side. *Ayana Byrd*



Dr. Dre (1992)

Circumstance: After his production style defined an entire coast's rap sound and built an empire at Ruthless Records, Dre felt cheated by CEOs Jerry Heller and Eazy-E. Enter Suge Knight. Exit the good Dr.

Settlement: Somewhere between two metal pipes and an undisclosed wad of cash.

Outcome: Meet the new boss: Death Row Records. Worth more than \$125 million by 1995.



Dr. Dre (1996)

Circumstance: The good Dr. knows how to get when the gettin's good. Citing creative differences, Dre broke camp from partner Suge Knight—just moments before the feds began probing into Death Row's shady dealings—and started his own Aftermath Entertainment.

Settlement: "Comfortable" (according to Dre in an October 1996 VIBE interview).

Outcome: *Dr. Dre Presents...the Aftermath* didn't break any new musical ground, but we did get to see the former G's romantic side in the "Been There Done That" video's tango scene. Aftermath's release of Nas Escobar, Foxy Brown, Nature, and AZ's *The Firm: The Album* and rumored reunions with Cube and Snoop have kept Dre's name in the spotlight.



The Artist

Circumstance: After 20 years and 23 albums under Warner Bros., the Purple One accused the label of "institutionalized slavery." The Artist defiedly scrawled SLAVE on his cheek and got a skilled lawyer to maneuver through the red tape that spelled f-r-e-e-d-o-m.

Settlement: Releasing complaints and lazy, substandard material, the Artist waited out the six-month, \$100-million deal he signed with Warners in 1992.

Outcome: After leaving Warner Bros. in 1996, the Artist entered into a distribution deal with EMI for his NPG Records. (First offering, '96's *Emancipation*, went platinum.) After EMI North America's dissolution, the Artist is now an independent agent, putting out his own work and that of friends like Larry Graham and Chaka Khan.



George "I Want My Sex" Michael

Circumstance: In 1992, at the height of his post-Wham! popularity, Michael grew tired of what he thought was a marketing strategy that focussed more on his face than on his vocal chords. Celling his eight-album contract "professional slavery" (a full two years before the Artist hyperbolized the term), Michael began a protracted legal battle with Sony Records. In 1996, DreamWorks showed that they had *Faith* and bought out his contract.

Settlement: Thirty-\$40 million

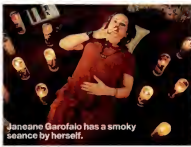
Outcome: George's first post-Sony release, *Older* (1996), made considerably less of an impression than his public-toilet masturbation fiasco would two years later.

Getting It Up in Smoke

In a world running out of taboos, new-school fetishists have fun with carcinogens

The porn business makes the Academy Awards via a *Boogie Nights* nomination; Budweiser runs beer commercials featuring cross-dressers during sporting events; and sado-masochistic spike heels top every fashion victim's wish list. It's obvious we live in a culture running out of taboos.

Meanwhile, California has banned smoking, even in bars. But remember, in June 1990, 49 weeks after its release, the 2 Live Crew's *As Nasty As They*



Janeane Garofalo has a smoky seance by herself.

Wanna Be jumped 29 spots on *Billboard's* album sales charts after record-store owners in Florida were arrested for its distribution. Push something to the margins, and—more often than not—it becomes awfully attractive.

So, as Joe Camel trots off into the sunset, the country's computer screens and VCRs have begun displaying the by-products of a sexual yearning that could only have occurred in this antitobacco era: the smoking fetish. Apparently, some people find nothing more stimulating than the sight of a woman with her lips wrapped around a cigarette. In newsletters, on Web sites, and in "smokesploitation" videos like *Smoky Kisses* (CohorentLight, Oklahoma City, Okla.), attractive women stare into the camera's lens and draw languorously on Virginia Slims, Marlboros, Kools, and cigars. The longer the better. Extra credit if you can French inhale or blow smoke rings. But apart from the odd hardcore video in which actual sex acts are featured, "smoking porn" involves fully clothed women doing nothing more than smoking a cigarette—making this simultaneously the most chaste and potentially lethal sexual fetish of them all.

As with any fetishists worth their weight in Vaseline, these guys are serious about it. On Internet Web sites like L.U.N.G.S. (Ladies Using Nicotine for Great Satisfaction) and the Smoking Fetish Message Board, they trade tips on where to look for free shows (i.e., just outside the front door of nonsmoking office buildings, where addicted employees puff away their coffee breaks). Published and edited by Mike Williams, out of East Providence, Rhode Island, *Smoke Signals: The Monthly Publication Devoted to the Smoking Fetish* features erotic fiction with a very particular focus: "Her cigarette was done, and she crushed it out. I immediately picked up the pack and popped another cigarette out, saying, 'Here you go.' She took it without hesitation, and as she placed it to her lips to light, I flicked the lighter. She was really into this! She was inhaling drags faster than I was, but not inhaling as deeply. She told me that smoking was great, that she never knew that it could be so much fun." (Volume 4, number 6, February 1998.) *Leg Show*, an adult magazine out of New York with a circulation of 250,000, often runs smoking pictorials through their leg and foot fetish spreads.

"Smoking greatly increases the sexiness of an already attractive woman," says "John," an avid smoking fetishist who works as a record company executive. "The sexiest thing I



Surgeon general, surgeon schmeneral! Gina Gershon puffs a stogie.

could imagine is a woman French inhaling."

Smoke Signals' Williams says that society's growing acceptance of sexual discourse enables the smoking fetishist greater visibility. He cites television shows like the *Jerry Springer Show* and *Real Sex* on HBO as indicators of "a climate in which people feel more comfortable being vocal about having something a little out of the ordinary in their sexual diet."

Surely, it was no mistake that R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Co. replaced Joe Camel with the *What you're looking for* ad campaign. Those sultry images of deeply satisfied looking women exhaling plumes of smoke through pouty lips tell it all.

Hugh Garvey



PHOTOGRAPH BY STEPHAN

"THE PRICE OF HATING OTHER HUMAN BEINGS IS LOVING ONESELF LESS."

—Eldridge Cleaver. August 31, 1935–May 1, 1998

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MARC BUCHANAN



PHOTOGRAPHY: RANDALL SCOTT



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IN THE MIX SAY WORD!



1. What's happening now? Reverend Fred "Rerun" Berry traumatized partygoers at N.Y.C.'s Webster Hall when he decided to stop pop-locking and strip. 2. Looks like certain fashionistas lost their *minds* on the runway this past spring. At Betsie Johnson's N.Y.C. show, model Will LeMay wore underwear so snug it lowered his sperm count. Why do you think his lips are pressed together so tightly? *Ouch!* (3.) Lenny Kravitz was also in the spirit of things at Betsie's show—and showed off his pubic zirconias. 4. *Gadzam!* Bernie Mac must've seen someone get "buck-ed nekkid" during the Kings of Comedy Tour. He gave an off-the-hook performance at Washington, D.C.'s Warner Theater. 5. Usher raised the roof at N.Y.C.'s Madison Square Garden when he did a tribute to Bobby "My Prerogative" Brown. If it weren't for Usher's abs of steel, we'd be mad at him for bringing back that red leather outfit. 6. Steele of Da Cocoa Brovaz was footloose at the duo's album signing (at N.Y.C.'s Fat Beats). We wonder who got booted? 7. Poor Biz Markie worked *hard* deejaying at the Jam Rock concert in Long Island. At least they could have offered him something edible. 8. It wasn't surprising Jenny Jones invited Sykk-e, fyne and Chill to be guests on her show about "secret crushes." As we all know, Ms. fyne's hit, "Romeo and Juliet," is most appropriate. 9. At the Sickle Cell Celebrity Jam III in L.A.'s Sports Arena, Ginuwine whined from the sidelines. Guess he's better with ponies than he is with basketballs. 10. Guru may have been wondering where all the copies of Gang Starr's new *Moment of Truth* went, but he should be glad that they're flying off the racks. He and Premier, after four dope tries, finally went gold! 11. *Quiet!*-Tip can hardly wait to taste his b-day cake at N.Y.C.'s Club Speed. Hope he didn't drool on it. *Kenya N. Byrd*





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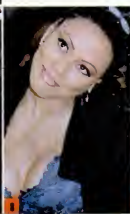




IN THE MIX TOO WE BE CLUBBIN'!

1. If you wanna be a player, you gotta learn to handle your Cubans. At the L.A. premiere party for *The Players Club*, John Singleton and Ice Cube play the Big Willie role well at the Century Club. 2. VJ Ralph MacDaniels listens intently to Playa as they explain a true playa's philosophy: Don't hate the player, hate the game. 3. Walter Mosley strolled into the New York premiere of *Always Outnumbered* (based on his 1997 book *Always Outnumbered, Always Outgunned*) with his lovely date, Natalie Cole. Please let that be his lucky tie. 4. Stanley Clarke obviously enjoyed his own show just as much (if not more) than the audience at the Bronco Bowl in Dallas. He knows how a bass is supposed to be stroked! 5. How adorable. Labelmates Brandy and Lil' Kim play footsie at the Wilhelmnia/Atlantic Records party. The Queen B performed, and Brandy gave her a sweet intro. 6. Rosie Perez proudly accepted her Latina Heritage Award, but not before double-checking that her name was spelled correctly. 7. Three the hard way: John Forte, China Chow, and Pras represented at the 30th-anniversary party for China's father's posh N.Y.C. eatery, Mr. Chow's. 8. Lela Rochon was stunning (as usual) at this year's *Essence Awards* in N.Y.C. (9.) Why is Chris Rock sooo crazy? He flicked the bird to photographers then struck his best martial arts stance. Guess he was tuning up for *Lethal Weapon 4*. 10. Case seemed to vanish shortly after he touched and teased us. But luckily Timbaland found him at N.Y.C.'s Metronome. 11. Don't mess with whatever beverage SWV's Taj threw down on after the group's performance at Club Onyx in Miami. And please don't wake her, she's dreaming.

K.N.B.



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And the Winner Is...

And also what you have not requested I will give you, both riches and glory, so that there will not be any among the kings like you, all your days.—1 Kings 3: 13

About four months after returning from making movies in D.C., the cast, including myself, had resumed their daily lives. The only thing on my mind was eating regularly. The next time I heard from our director, Marc Levin, all he said was, "Pack your stuff, we're going to Utah!"

SLAM was entered in the 1998 Sundance Film Festival at the last minute. This year there were 674 applications submitted in the drama category at Sundance, which Robert Redford has been running since 1985. Of all those hopefuls, only 16 films are chosen for competition. Sixteen! Geoffrey Gilmore, programming director of the Festival, took time out to call Offline Entertainment and thank us for making the kind of movie that Sundance was made to exhibit.

The film that took us 12 days to shoot in and around Washington, D.C.'s prison system had a chance to be seen by some of Hollywood's most influential players. It was time to run with the big boys—a role I've been waiting all my life to score. Saul, Sonia, Beau, and I took a picture together in the airport, marking the start of a journey that would change all our lives forever. We pledged to come strong or not at all.

During the flight, I thought about Judge Bell, the man who put me to sleep for four months. A week before this trip, I bumped into him in the elevator at Macy's. I was staring right at the nigga, and he didn't recognize me. Seeing him brought back hours in the roach-infested bullpen of filth and those biochemical sandwiches. As I got off, I looked him in the eye and said, "Happy retirement, judge. I wasn't smiling."

I don't hold any grudge against him, though. If I did, we'd both be retired. I've paid my fair share of debts across the bench. And now, just hours away from Sundance, it hit me: We're in the playoffs! One of the final 16 who get to ball in the Independent Film Championship of America.

January 17, we touched down in Park City, one of the country's best spots for skiing and schmoozing. The first night, we held a sit-down at a five-star chalet to discuss our strategy. The mission was to bomb the Festival with spoken-word joints to give those Mormons and moguls a blast of culture they'd never forget. Our guerrilla marketing tactics were in place.

The minute we got to Main Street, the buzz was hot! We dubbed our multiracial gang the God Squad. Without comments, we got to the first party 15 deep. We told 'em we were on a mission from God and got the green light. "The Big East" immediately took over the dance floor. We walked in listening to Willie Nelson

and left to the Gap Band. Saul (who plays Ray, *SLAM*'s prison poet) and Beau Sia (a genteman of the Asian persuasion who gets in Ray's grill) started B-boyin' in the middle of the room. By the time they broke into windmills and vintage uproak, the whole crowd was open. Liza (a wordslinger who drops bombs in *SLAM*) had the beauty and grace of a supermodel; watching her make her bones as an actress was ecstasy. Sonia (who plays Lauren Bell, the prison instructor who helps Ray find the soul within himself) got chased by every swinger on the hill. And me, I was the Intellectual Zen Gangster playin' the yard.

We lived each moment as if it were our last on Earth—and it worked. We had absolutely no money, but the richest itinerary: hot tubs, jacuzzis, skiing, snowmobiles, mansion parties. We gave interviews with every magazine you can think of and did cable in five languages. MTV called us "the future." We were swarmed by managers, agents, lawyers, and executives from all over the world. Even if we didn't win an award out here, we already had the contracts and contacts to put us in a league of our own. One night back at the condo, as we were laughing about the night's action, it all hit us. To come out of lockdown and make the kind of impact we've made shows the watching world that there is a God. Asked what his favorite part of the trip was, Saul said somberly, "Lives

are changing," and silence fell upon the room.

On the last day, we all went to the mountain-top. We said a prayer, huddled, then jumped on our snowmobiles and tried to kill each other. I wore a suit and goggles, so I wouldn't have to change for the Awards Ceremony. Nothing stained, nothing stuck; this couldn't be luck. That night was graduation to the third degree: January 25, when outlaws became free. I always knew I could fly, but I didn't try hard enough before, and with all the pain and suffering it takes to be an overnight success, never once have I cried—till tonight.

As Alfre Woodard was onstage announcing the winner, Beau gave me a pound and said, "Hold it down." It was at that moment, just before the tears rolled down my face, that I realized how far we'd come. All those nights in jail pretending to use the toilet, and the first film I ever wrote was up for the top spot at Sundance? This film was distributed by God, who hears the prayers of the imprisoned ones—in and out of jail.

All 17 of us sat holding our hearts in our hands. Yeah, I was scared—more than meeting with the warden at Flikers or any of the gang leaders behind the brick walls of injustice. But to sit in a darkened theater surrounded by tears of appreciation for our work—and for brothers and sisters locked down—was one of the highest honors any individual can receive.

It's been two years since I've gotten high. That's good news. Now for the bad news: I came outta the joint to lock down all major areas of industry, and I'm bringin' heads with me. I ain't sayin' that the rest of y'all can't eat, but if you don't promote peace, you got beef! I've acted out of goodwill and seen the fear it brings out in my enemies—in and out of jail. They bet against us! Didn't trust us! Wouldn't touch us! Thank Great God for just us, 'cause now they can't touch us! He has found us worthy of praise! The film that was named the Grand Jury Prize winner of the 1998 Sundance Film Festival is... *SLAM*.

When we accepted the award, Saul dropped a verse that speaks for all of us. I've always said Who can't hear must feel. So feel this:

*sun dances in the sky
its rays choreograph the day,
passing clouds prouette
cumulus come what may;
by no means the darkest ray of the sun
a shaman of shadows cast your net in my lungs
and reap the dreams of my breath
of these hymns seldom sung.
black's the gift
to be young, to be young...
our time has come.*

For more jewels, pick up *SLAM*, the book, due this fall from Grove/Atlantic. □



**It was at that moment,
just before the tears
rolled down my face,
that I realized how
far we'd come.**

Tuph Street By Bönz Malone

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There's a Riot Goin' On

I moved to New York City in 1982 to be up on the Next—whatever was the fly-fresh, wildest, boldest thing going in the arts, especially music, and in particular black music. What made the time so exciting was that people were recombining music styles like mad. You could hear punk rock guitars scratching up against James Brown bass lines and bebop trombones; cats who played with Ornette Coleman and Cecil Taylor were forging revolutionary bands out of Brooklyn funkateers and calypso refugees. Max Roach was doing gigs with three turntablists and Fab 5 Freddy. Hip hop was re-inventing music every week on small independent labels. Avant-garde jazz legends like Lester Bowie, David Murray, and Henry Threadgill were continuing to push the envelope, and two blood brothers out of New Orleans with the surname Marsalis were just starting to make some noise. As time marched on, Public Enemy and the Native Tongues brought literary sophistication to hip hop lyrics, and Living Colour's Vernon Reid formed the Black Rock Coalition with a little help from his friends. The corporatization of rap was years away, and for a minute, it seemed as if anything was possible, even the obliteration of the myth that rock 'n' roll was "white boy" music.

Fast-forward 16 years. Right now is one of the most exciting times to be living in New York City if you're a fiend for the Next. The reason why has to do with a small but frenetic underground scene of young artists (average age 25) who are sharing stages and resources and collectively taking rhyming, turntabling, free jazz, and rocking-out to ungodly extremes.

Moving freely between deep-black Brooklyn and Manhattan's pale-shaded Lower East Side, this wrecking crew of demolition artists is dissolving the boundaries between hip hop, grunge, spoken word, drum 'n' bass, free jazz, and experimental deejaying. The beautiful thing is, you can go out and check for this phenomenon damn near any night of the week. If it's Sunday, you make your way downtown to the Brooklyn YWCA for the Tea Party, where live bands and deep house blast from the stage and the wheels of steel. The live element has included Erykah Badu and Vernon Reid, while the Paradise Garage-style mixing is the work of organizer Ian Friday.

After Tea Party, troop over the bridge to SoHo's Spring Street to hear the Bell Caffè band. Dallas-raised altoist, poet, and doo-wop wrangler Micah Gaugh (who happens to have been in a play with Badu) leads the rhythm section of doom into the farthest reaches of free-form fundakified filth. A natural-born star in black leather pants and wraparound extraterrestrial sunglasses, Gaugh

also plays bass with thrash diva Honeychild, who brings to mind Björk meeting Minäam Makeba in the Sex Pistols' basement. Honeychild is down with a consortium known as Sista Grrls, a bevy of bands led by four black female rock 'n' rollers. The raunchiest of these is silver-glitter guitar-banging mama named Maya (yet another Dallas head). Sista Grrls organizer Tamar-Kali describes Maya as "Jimi Hendrix with a pussy." If so, then Simmie, a sensuous violinist/guitarist/vocalist may best be summed up as Kurt Cobain in hot pants.

On Wednesdays, our man Gaugh turns up on the Lower East Side for his other regular engagement at Baby Jupiter with the Blank Slates, whose lineup shifts from week to week but, at one time or another, has consisted of illibent DJ Sings; DJ

Spooky on his first instrument, upnbt bass, or the hyperprogressive lyricists Priest, M. Sayid, Sha-Key (who has her own jungle/hip hop group, Edgecombe), and Beans, who is also a part of Vernon Reid's current band, Masque.

Beans, Priest, and Sayid have formed the first label of this crew, Anti-Pop, specializing in cassettes and vinyl. Their first album is a compilation, *The Tragic Epilogue*, soon to be followed by Beans's solo EP, *Breath Made Visible*. Beans is someone I've been following since he used to light up Rap Meets Poetry shows in Lower Manhattan, back in '94. He always stood out because of his Shakespearean writing ("Existence has become a composition in void") and unique theatrical devices, like the sweat sock he painted into a talking snake or the banana-seat bicycles he once rode onto the stage. Hailing from Westchester County, N.Y. (better known around these parts as West Bumblefuck), Beans is a hypnotic performer who believes in keeping it surreal.

That works for the aforementioned Tamar-Kali (taken from her given Hebraic first name and, yes, the Hindu warrior-goddess), who grew up in Brooklyn listening to her father play Boosy and Larry Graham on the record player and the bass. She sang before she spoke, an occurrence she attributes to dad singing scales to her when she was in the womb. Fishbone fans have already heard the adult Tamar wait backup with Joi during the tour that the southern siren did with the mosh-pit kings in '96. Tamar never thought she had to justify her love for rock to anyone. "It wasn't a choice; it was just who I flowed. I grew up in a free environment, so I could be who I am and not just one of the things I could be. And if white kids don't need a reference to sing with loud guitars then neither do I."

Pulling together the womyn-power shows she calls riots, Tamar barely hints at the ultimate revolution she's got in store for your mind. "What I stand for is just having black folks reclaim their shit as far as whatever—music, spirituality, body modification. [Tamar has piercings like Puffy's got Benjamins.] I'm tired of us not knowing about ourselves. [Beans has piercings like me and saying, 'Oh, you on that white shit? No, I'm on that Masai shit, how about that? Or, I'm on that Cherokee and Mohawk shit because I'm part that too. My music is about truth and bringing that to the light so that we get back to having some balance. People are generating drama around this millennium we got coming up; so as artists we need to be about more than just madness.' Here's an amen from this corner, sistta, and let the riot act be read. □



Right now is one of the most exciting times to be living in N.Y.C. if you're a fiend for the Next.

Black-Owned By Greg Tate

NEXT

PEOPLE
ON THE
VEGET

SONJA BLADE

Strong enough for a man

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARC BAPTISTE

Sonja Blade, 20, is not your average female MC. But then again, if you ask her, she's not a female MC, period. Matching the bravado and showmanship of her best male counterparts, this self-proclaimed "female Nicholas Cage" possesses lyric assault capability of ripping any face-off. Already the streets are buzzing about her mix-tape *MtE-to-MtE* with Caribbean; her underground single "Unfuckwittable" that buzz alone has stars like Jai-Z, Foxy Brown, and Mr. "Brown Sugar" himself, Mick Jagger, eager to collaborate with Sonja as she completes her debut album, also called *UNFUCKWITTABLE*, due from Clarkworld/Motown this fall.

"I don't wanna be labeled as a female MC," says the Bed-Stuy brickhouse. "What do females rap about? What do males rap about? I'm saying the same thing—what people wanna hear." Basketball coach Shaquille O'Neal liked enough of what he heard to enlist Blade as his latest personal rhyme "trainer," providing her with the company as Peter Dinklage, Cuba Gooding, Jr., and a DJ.

But as a female rapper, that she says she isn't, why Sonja Holder, whose soft voice straddles the masculine line of the chords of a Dinklage/McCartney/Prince/Jay-Z fusion, could live out the MC's dream—*she's not a man*? "For the most part, I keep things quiet," says Sonja, who grew up listening to MC 10 and Azzuette—in a house that felt male. "But I was always in front of the mirror, going to work it out. Now, when I step in the room, I feel it and know it's from Sonja Holder, not the product of a man."

"In a minute, the world is going to be headed by a girl," says Superman DJ/producer Clark Kent, who signed Sonja to his label on the strength of a one-verse freestyle. "She's not a female; she's an MC, true to the form. It's not about the image. It's not about the styling, it's not about the clothes; it's about the rhymes first."

But even as she demolishes gender-specific shackles, Sonja Blade is confidently every woman. "I know my femininity," she states, combing loose hairs in place with freshly painted nails. "When I come out of my jeans, I know what I got, but I don't have to do that on camera. I ain't no female-type rapper or sex symbol. I'm just trying to be an MC—a top dog." And may the best wo-man win. *Darwin Chow*



NEXT

PEOPLE
ON THE
VERGE

K.P. & ENVYI *Get shortly* PHOTOGRAPH BY BENJAMIN BROWN

Black or white? "Why is that an issue?" says 17-year-old Susan "Envyi" Hedgepeth, the very light skinned half of K.P. & Envyi. "I get questioned about that a lot, and it aggravates me. I just want everyone to look at me as Envyi: a girl who loves to sing."

And sing she does on the infectious "Swing My Way," from the bass compilation *Rhythm & Quad 116 Vol. 1* (EastWest/Elektra Records). The song debuted at No. 3 on *Billboard's* rap chart, but Hedgepeth—whose mother is French-American and whose father is African-American—has come under the scrutiny of the old Name That Ethnicity game. "It upsets Envyi, but I honestly think she takes it too seriously," says 22-year-old Atlanta-born Kia "K.P." Phillips, the MC on "Swing." "I tell her, They're not trying to offend you; they just want to know about you."

The thing many fans don't know is that the pair aren't even a real "duo." The girls recorded the hit separately for bass whiz Michael "Mixzo" Johnson. He put them together for this one single while the girls were actually strangers to each other. K.P. and Envyi were, and still are, pursuing separate music paths. K.P. has her own Atlanta-

based hip hop group called the Kaperz, who are signed to Legacy Records. Meanwhile, Envyi, who commutes between North Carolina's Weldon High School and Los Angeles to work on her solo album for Elektra, dreams of becoming the next Mariah Carey, her idol and fellow biracial homegirl.

So, how did these two bass music rookies pull off the hottest bass record of the year? "I was kind of skeptical at first because I don't really rap in that style," says K.P., who sped up her normal delivery to fit the dance track. "It was really a challenge, but after a while, I got it." As for Envyi: "I didn't know too much about bass music, so I was kinda scared," she recalls. "I sang to it like it was an R&B song and just put my own little vibe in there."

It wasn't until the day before their video shoot that the girls finally met. But just as their voices matched on the track, K.P. and Envyi clicked immediately in person and have been tight ever since. "It's like they'd been together forever," says producer Mixzo. Let's keep our fingers crossed for a "Swing My Way"—Part Two. *Jeff Lorez*

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STEP UP. YOUR DRINK IS WAITING.

MEAT

PEOPLE
ON THE
VENUE

MYA

PHOTOGRAPH BY PHILIPPE SIMONON

There's something missing from the Washington, D.C. studio where Mya Hanson is rehearsing for her summer tour with Boyz II Men. She leads six dancers through the sultry routine, with her wide smile and black ringlets bouncing. Then the absence in the room becomes clear: no publicist, no manager. No one.

In this age of ever present entourages, it's rare to find an artist without an assortment of spin doctors, bodyguards, and baby-sitters in tow. Especially one who's 18 and stealing the show from Pras and Ol' Dirty Bastard on the hit song "Ghetto Superstar" (from the *Bulworth* soundtrack).

"An artist needs to focus on what an artist loves to do—which is perform," she says later in the food court of the Capital City's Union Station. "You don't need to be surrounded by all the butlerap."

It was Mya's father (and former manager) who first trimmed down her circles. "I was not allowed to talk to boys. Mya had to be allowed to, but I was so scared," she recalls. Her father's protective hand only loosened its grip last year, when she began work on her self-titled debut. "He used to tease me: 'You better not have a boy over the house, and you better not talk on the phone. You get straight A's.'" His focus on academics paid off, in addition to singing and writing some of her songs. Sherman Harrison's daughter also plays the violin, designs clothes, and is trained in ballet and tap.

But watching her giggle over young-girl secrets while eating buffalo wings with a girlfriend, it's hard to believe this is the same Mya who exchanges seductive stares with Dru Hill's Sistaq in the video for her hot single "It's All About Me." But Mya's comfortable with the dichotomy, insisting, "I'm not a goody-goody, I get down." Flashing an unhearsed smile, she adds: "I'm sassy, but not sleazy. I don't have to be giving head to anybody to be sexy." Point taken.

Mya chooses to communicate more subtly with body language. "Through dance is where I tell my story," she says. "It's like, Look at me. Look at what I can do," she says with a laugh. "Cause when it's time for attention, I want all the attention."

Kris Cox



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NEXT

PEOPLE
ON THE
VERGE

ANGEL Eternal Flame

PHOTOGRAPH BY BARRON CLAIBORNE

Angel Grant looks around 23 years old—24, tops. With lightning Poochontas tresses, wide eyes, flawless burnished skin, and a subtle brow piercing, the striking songstress has an enigmatic youthful glow—but she pleads the Fifth when it comes to revealing her age.

"My spirit is very old," is her nonanswer to the question. "I'm not trying to be mean or sound crazy, but my age changes with whatever's going on," Angel insists. "There are different people inside of me; I respect them, and my music shows that." Unconventional? Maybe, but so is everything about this self-described gypsy whose debut disc, simply titled *Album*, is the first release on Flyte Tyme, the new label herx production partner Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis.

Born in New York and raised throughout the southern United States, Angel was working as a hairdresser in Atlanta when she set aside a month's rent so she could quit her job and pursue her music destiny. As fate would have it, a friend of hers, Khary from the '80s group the Boys, asked Angel to contribute vocals to a fellow songwriter's demo tape. The demo was submitted to Jam and Lewis, who have produced everyone from the Time to Janet Jackson. The duo immediately rejected the songwriter but were struck by Angel's voice, which, Jam says, "makes you think of plants and birds and all the real things that make a person rich."

One phone call and two weeks later, Angel moved to the funky landscape of Minneapolis to begin work on

her album. "They flew me up and had never met me or anything," says Grant, who cowrote all of the album's tracks with Jam and Lewis. "But as soon as I got here it felt like home, and it's been magic ever since." The result is a mix of everything from the alternative rock of "Illusions" to the breezy meanderings of "Well Okay I'll Say It (I'm in Love With You)" (featuring Stevie Wonder on harmonica) to the balladry of her first single, "La Red Boat." Grant calls her aural mélange "folk funk," explaining: "It's something old, new, borrowed, blue—it's now."

Whatever it is, here it is a sound that evokes images of a girl's vulnerability belied by a woman's solidity. This Angel has soul for the ages. *—Ariane Elyse*

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AND RETRAGES OF THE WORLD: UNITE!
WYCLEF JEAN DEMANDS YOU EXPERIENCE
HIS CARNIVAL VIBE. KRIS EXBUILDS WITH
THE BORGED-OUT BANDLEADER

DOMINOES

Revised to November 1995. The Fugees are on the endangered species list, one flop away from being one-hit wonders and moving through the belly of the recording industry beat with the speed of a high-powered colonic.

The trio—Laurny Hill, Wyclef Jean, and Prasarezl "Pras" Michel—met in a Columbia Records conference room, aware that an unseen choir of critical voices is singing an ode to Lauryn Hill (with a refrain saying that her full lips and milk chocolate voice are the crew's true milk). On the table is a plan for recruiting from their haphazard debut, *Blissed Out Reality* (Ruffhouse/Columbia), in their corner is the Salsam Remi remix of *Blissed's* "Nappy Heads," "Vocals," and their bell-pepper-hot live sound set, complete with italics, acoustic strumming, and turntable tactics. On the screen is a rough edit of their comeback single, "Fu-Gee-La." In their pockets is *The Score*, mastered the night before.

Pras's turn. His pager's been going off with the regularity of a cuckoo clock, so he moves quickly. "Last time, we went coppers, [this time,] I figure we go bronze."

"We took our way up through the chain of metals," Lauryn laughs. The bourgeoisie queen is downing coffee. She's got her studies at

Columbia University and a gestating artistic career.

Then Wyclef Jean untucks a propogia as theory as heavy as the double-headed top piece. "Remember I told you that," he says. "When I say the 'retrages,' it's like the fugees is here." He sen one finger on the table. Then, making large circles round the stationary finger with his other hand, he continues: "The mass of people, that's what's going to make the Fugees. And that mass you can't stop, because the music we're doing, we doing it for them. Somewhere on this planet, the album will win."

The Fugees do have a certain way of flipping expectations like solid bricks of cotton. Nineteen ninety-six's *The Score* featured covers of tunes by Roberta Flack and Bob Marley. Audacious and highly marketable, such moves helped the crew clamp its collective pain around two Grammys (Best Rap Album and Best R&B Group) for the remake of Flack's 1973 "Killing Me Softly With His Song." The album went on to sell 17 million copies worldwide, breaking records, time zones, and language barriers, moving international acts and detrités with the same ease as it did homegrown butt cheeks.

Theonists who thought the Fugees were a cover-band who would languish on the wedding circuit got left holding an even heavier hand when Clief released last year's platinum round-the-world-or-

one-album, *Wyclef Jean Presents the Carnival Featuring Refugee Allstars*. It generated the gold single "Gone Till November," as well as title hits "We're Trying to Stay Alive" and "Gunsanunamara." He proved himself an able bilingual MC with songs such as "Sung Hail," "Yell," and "Jaspone," and a string of No. 1 hits in his native Haiti. Also, making runs for best producer on the mike, Clief's the unifying factor that allows you to mention the Neville Brothers, Bounty Killer, Shmyly Red, Gloria Estefan, Dr. Cocoa Brovaz, Suno of Man, and Earth, Wind & Fire in the same sentence without feeling like you're trying to be all cruncy and multicultural.

Passengers are advised that the Secretary of Transportation has determined that *Four-Ain-Prins, Haiti* does not maintain and administer effective airport security measures.

A sign at the security gate of the Daytona Beach International Airport, Florida

NIelut Wyclef Jean was born in Haiti, outside of Croix-des-Bouquets ("Cross of Flowers"), in 1970. "First thing I don't think of was supposed to come to Earth," Wyclef says over a plate of buffalo wings in the restaurant of Daytona's Radisson Resort. "When my mother was in labor with me, they took forceps, went

PHOTOGRAPH BY WALTER CHIN

up inside of her, and pulled me out. So, in the back of my ears, I got two holes." He places his index fingers where his jaw hinges to his cranium. "If they didn't do that, I would have suffocated." Clef's grandfather was a voodoo priest; his father is a Nazarene minister. "There's all types of vibes that go on in the family," he says nonchalantly. "From religion, spiritual—some might call it mystical."

Clef doesn't speak much about his time in Haiti, referring to it only in abstract spurts: church, church, church, playing music on makeshift instruments of metal rubbish, household utensils, and furniture, learning how to put a gun together, and experiencing things that would later cause him to laugh at *The Serpent and The Rainbow*, that pedestrian 1968 film about a scientist's exploration of Haitian Voodoo.

While Haiti suffered under the regime of Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier, Clef's father, Pastor Gessner Jean, fled to Miami to lay a better foundation for his family. An illegal immigrant, Pastor Jean worked at a garment factory, earning 50 cents an hour—a marked increase from Haiti's average of \$3 a day. But his employers had an unscrupulous practice of their own. "They'd load immigrants and refugees in there and let them work for a month," Clef says about his dad's former bosses. "Then they'd call Immigration, deport them, and let the next group come in." On the day of the raid, Pastor Jean was one of three men who escaped the INS net. "If he'd gotten caught," says Wyclef, "I probably wouldn't be here right now."

Clef's father would become a legal resident in 1972, and later relocate his family to Coney Island, Brooklyn when Clef was eight. An autodidactic musician, the young Jean interpolated radio hits, placing them underneath gospel vocals in his father's Flatbush Nazarene church. "Outside the church," Wyclef says, "drug dealings would be going on. Inside, my father was preaching from the book of Revelation." But it was Wyclef's mother who kept him from extracurricular street activities. "My mom got me my first guitar," he says. "She geared me toward music."

Wyclef is a straight-up Haitian. Aspiring pop culture phenoms routinely change their names to cover any traces of ethnicity, but Wyclef Jean unapologetically displays his lineage in word and in deed. Not only has he relentlessly shouted-out his homeland on record, he decorated himself in Haiti's red and blue flag at the Grammys and has started the Wyclef Jean Foundation, a nonprofit organization geared toward helping Haitian refugees and their families at home and abroad. He's also trying to take the sting out of the government's cuts in funding for the arts and recreation. "My dream," he says, "is to get Wyclef Jean buildings, just like they have YMCA buildings, in Brooklyn and in Little Haiti in Miami."

The Wyclef Jean Foundation was created in response to the outcome of the April 1997 Fugees'

Homecoming concert in Haiti. Intended to raise money for orphans and to relocate Haitian refugees who'd been sent home, the concert attracted an audience of nearly 100,000. Before leaving, a skeptical Wyclef warned the crowd: "Tomorrow, I'll be on a plane back to New York. Watch where the money goes." Clef was right.

Later, the government claimed that the concert, which grossed \$300,000, only broke even. Many Haitians, as well as the Fugees, felt that the government fattened the concert costs. "The government could do something like that," says Wyclef, "and no one could prove anything." On May 16 of this year, Clef staged a similar benefit concert (featuring Salt-N-Pepa, Lord Tariq & Peter Gunz, Canibus, and Scarface Dem Crew). This time, though, the happening went

in the gray cotton.

"I am the same cat that, when I was coming out, no one was checking for," he says, moving through the festive Florida streets in anonymity. Clef's a simple man, living by simple truths such as *Destiny bows to inflexible willpower and a concentrated sense of self*. By applying this ethic, he's gone from full pews in storefront churches to sold-out arenas. "All I did was work hard musically to get respect," he says. "I don't have anyone in the studio playing the guitar for me and then saying 'I'm doing it. I worked hard for years and years and years to get what I'm getting musically.'"

"We play every instrument, from guitar, piano, drums," says Jerry "Wonder" Duplessis, Clef's cousin and coproducer, who is close to inking a deal with Interscope Records for his Booga Basement imprint (named after the East Orange, New Jersey studio where *The Score* was recorded). "It's like, any work that Clef do, Jerry is always there," he says, speaking of himself, as Wyclef has a tendency to do, in the third person. "You think I'm playing the bass, it's not me playing the bass, it's Clef. Sometimes you thinking Clef's playing the guitar, but it's not Clef playing the guitar, it's me."

At a mid-May session in Manhattan's Sony Studios, this ethos is in action. Clef sits behind the boards listening to the vocal riffs of MB2, a female R&B duo signed to Booga Basement. Jerry embellishes a sparse bass line and softens drum thumps with help from an MPC-3000. Few words are spoken. The song takes shape by ear and



SAY IT LOUD: Wyclef moves the crowd.

"OUTSIDE THE CHURCH," WYCLEF SAYS, "DRUG DEALINGS WOULD BE GOING ON. INSIDE, MY FATHER WAS PREACHING FROM THE BOOK OF REVELATION."

down in Miami; it ran with precision. And Mr. Jean promises the loot will go to his people in need.

NAVY SEALS

Daytona Beach, Florida is home to the annual Black College Reunion, which means a sea of flesh and arrogance, released inhibitions and blocked traffic, lost goddesses displaying their goods in peafowlish abandon while forgotten gods traverse about the boardwalk like elephant bulls.

Clef is himself an epicenter for activity—a cross between the guy in the Mickey Mouse suit at Magic Kingdom and a department store Santa. He decides, after about two hours of people lining up for his picture and a photo under the cloudless afternoon sky, that "This is all an illusion. Watch. I'ma make all this disappear." He flashes a roguish grin and removes his T-shirt, leaving him only in a white tank top. He places the shirt over his head and has Beast, his ever present security person, cut out holes for his eyes and mouth and dons the garment like an impromptu bank robber. "You learn a lot of things growing up in the ghetto," he says, smiling through a tiny shred

instinct, becoming more accomplished and intricate with each go round.

It's not just the fierce musicality of Clef's toonage that sets it apart; it's also the raw genius of his music theory. His bass lines owe as much to the dirt-floored shanty towns of his homeland as they do to piss-redolent Brooklyn staircases. Both provide a backdrop for danceable, radio-friendly pop references, in-jokes dipped in imagination and nonfiction, and maintain a commercial gloss that doesn't betray the underground or hip hop's shining status as secret society. Plus, not since the heyday of Rakim, KRS-One, and Public Enemy has an artist or group been able to bring together the academic and the proletariat the way Wyclef does. He allows needs to feel hip, roughnecks to feel educated, and still he relays a political manifesto that satisfies the quiet Malcolm in us all. Even with the sonic effrontery of the Wu-Tang Clan, the ubiquity of Sean "Puffy" Combs's bid for world domination, and the mystic introspection-meets-guerrilla warfare tendencies of Bone Thugs-N-Harmony accounted for, the Refugee Camp may well be hip hop's most subversive clique. Who else could

get lyrics as blatant as "Standing on the block / Where the spot gets hot / Selling drugs / Guaranteed to get set up by crooked cops" ("Gone Till November") past BET and MTV censors, let alone make it past America's hero David Letterman?

try to capture what was," Wyclef says. We're in sunny Daytona Beach, and a group of girls look one at our hooded hero. "I remember coming from Haiti, growing up in [Brooklyn's] Marlboro projects. And to see a dude put a gun to your head and say, 'Yo, I'm about to blow your brains off right now' versus saying it in a song is two different things. I wanted to do a form of music and story and tell my side of the Fugees growing up."

The Fu crew have definitely grown up. "It's a blessing that we have the opportunity to do separate musical endeavors," says Lauryn over the telephone, her one-year-old son, Zion David, grabbing her attention in the background. (Fill, during this interview, denies persisting rumors of a Fugees breakup.) "All of us, we have the need to entertain, so that's why you see us out there doing other things that don't involve the other two."

"Clef is more like roots," says Pras, the Fugees third wonder, during a recent studio session for his own upcoming solo album, *Ghetto Superstar* (named after his recent hit single of the same name, featuring Mya and Ol' Dirty Bastard). "If it's the Fugees, then we have to compromise. You get a flavor of all three. Like, the other two members would never go and do a video like I did with 'Avenues' [from last year's *Money Talks* soundtrack]," he says of the hyperglam clip. "They'd be like, 'You fuckin' crazy.'" Different strokes for different MC folks....

Like Peter Tosh and Bob Marley, who often challenged social injustice with contagious lyric, Clef's most visceral sentiments are imbedded in playground singsong, creating some of the most melodic street rap ever. On "John 3:16" from last year's *Maggie Presents...The Soul Assassins Ch. 1* (Columbia), he begins with a pinpoint dramatization of an illegal get-rich-quick scheme: "Flight: Continental / Six o'clock in the

morning / Briefcase full of cocaine / On my way out, I tipped the doorman / Slow down, here comes the man with the German Shepherd / I got the plan, man / Meet me in the van / I got this kid from the Sudan / Bringing 'Tees from Iran." On *Garrison's* "Bubblegose," a murder narrative is guided by a rugged sketch of the *Gilligan's Island* theme. The folk ballad "Gone Till November" is a paean to interstate narrative adventures, while on the polyrhythmic "Street Jeopardy," Clef puts forth the tenuous question, "Have you ever heard the sound of a .44 at your door?"

"I take you in the world of emcein', and I take you in real life," he explains. "When I go, 'You provoked the psycho / Call Michael' [on 'Bubblegose'], it sounds violent. It sounds as if somebody cross me,

"THERE'S ALL TYPES OF VIBES THAT GO ON IN THE FAMILY," WYCLEF SAYS NONCHALANTLY. "FROM RELIGION, SPIRITUAL—SOME MIGHT CALL IT MYSTICAL."

I'm shoot them. But it ain't that. I take you in the gun world, then out of the gun world."

His approach to prose even causes a legendary storyteller such as Bob Dylan to dole out eloquent praise. "He's my man," says the reclusive folk bard, who came out of hiding to pop up in the video clip for "November." "The cat's got bright visions. Like the dew from the ground that never dies. I wish he was around in the '60s. I'm sure we'd have been playing together."

MAKING WAVES

Three days later, on another waterfront preptheat the Brooklyn Bridge, an MTV camera crew prepares to stake its lenses on Canibus while Clef holds a private conversation with Can's manager. Though Clef doesn't manage the stalwart rhymester, the Refugee Camp lived up to its name when it took in its fellow Caribbean brother in his time of need.

"I was dead in the water," confesses Can, recalling his bleak outlook after his appearance alongside DMX,

Method Man, and Redman on L.L. Cool J's recent "4,3,2,1" (Def Jam/Polygram). "Then [Clef] came to me with the 'Gone Till November' remix. I used that to grab a line. Then with '2nd Round K.O.', I swung to another line, to now where I'm back on my feet."

It's these visions of moves that best showcase Clef's position as a visionary and orchestrator. At Canibus's request, Clef called in Mike Tyson to provide a pep talk for "2nd Round K.O." (Universal/MCA), the surgically precise retort to L.L.'s scathing attack of the young'un on the remix to "4,3,2,1." Knowing that Can, who secured an underground rep through mix tapes, would quickly be labeled a battle MC, he provided him a serious longevity pill with the paradigm-shifting "How Come" (Interscope) from the *Budworth* soundtrack.

But now he must return to the battle. L.L. has released "The Ripper Strikes Back," a Mad Rapper-ish rebuttal in which Clef is described as a "Bob Marley impostor" receiving fellatio from Canibus. "That's disrespect," Clef says between MTV takes. "I have a little sister who loves hip hop. I don't want her hearing that." His cellular phone rings supreme—friends and business associates want to know if Canibus/L.L. is the type of beef Biggie talked about. "The streets is hot," Clef says, getting off the phone. "But, for the love of hip hop, we're gonna keep it on record." Any burials in this battle will be at the sound clash. (At press time, a Wyclef-penned song titled "What's the Clief Got to Do With It"—a get-back at an Uncle Diddy that features an irate Nappy Campbell—was released to radio, bringing the vinyl-sung drama to another high. Somebody's gotta keep it real.)

WHERE THE HEART IS

It's Sunday afternoon at the house Wyclef purchased recently for his mom on the South Orange, New Jersey hill, which means the Jean family is returning from church. There are a lot of them—uncles, aunts, and cousins who haven't seen Wyclef Jean in a few moons. *Bonjours* and *allos* are cordially passed back and forth. For a man who regularly performs in front of strangers, Clef seems uneasy in front of his family. But then that's what family is for: grounding and humbling. He makes his way to the garage, wherein he shows off his new baby, a vintage candy apple '58 Cadillac Seville he's just had imported from Puerto Rico. Making the portrait of a dapper gentleman in his crisp three-piece suit and three-gallon hat, Pastor Jean pops the hood and peers underneath. He has a sandy beard, high cheeks, fiery red eyes, and hands that, with a whole lot of tough love, have caressed the Bible, removed belts from his own waist with which to tear Clef a new asshole, and put up bolts to lock him out of the house when studio sessions kept him out to the wee hours. After all, Papa Jean told Clef time and time again about doing that "devil music."

And, alas, international superstardom offers no immunity from a parent's lament. "This car is a piece of junk," Pop says.

Clef laughs: "Yeah, that's why as soon as I get it



Clef and his wife, Giannette, at the Miami concert for the Wyclef Jean Foundation

fixed, you're going to be driving it right up and down the block with your hat tilted."

Later still, the car pulls up inside a Fairfield, NJ enclave of duplexes backed by a lake. As much as a man who spends most of his weeks on the road and his nights in the studio can have one, this is Wyclef's home. And no, he says he's not having an intimate affair with bandmate/close homie Lauryn (though it was rumored that they'd been lovers and that—before Lauryn named Rohan Marley as her son, Zion David's, father—Wyclef was the father of her child).

Nope, he's married, and has been for four years. His dutiful, beautiful wife, Claudenette, keeps the place cozy and appealing with her interior decorating skills: a plush white rug that Einstein, the French Poodle, relieves himself on, antique furniture, and free-flowing drapes. She fell in love with the son of a preacher man 10 years ago, when they lived around the corner from each other in East Orange. "That's how he threw it at me," she says of Clef's evangelistic advances. "—with the Bible." These days, she's the one who drags him to church on the Sundays he's in town.

It's a short visit home. He's scheduled to make an appearance at an album release party for the *Bubworth* soundtrack tonight at N.Y.C.'s Tunnel club. But first, Clef, dressed in an olive-colored Armani suit, makes a pit stop at his Midtown Manhattan penthouse.

"This is where we did a lot of *The Carnival*," Clef says, opening the door to the preproduction studio of his upscale crib, a spacious, sparsely decorated artist's den with hardwood floors and plaques all over the walls. It's a hip hop Don's Fortress of Solitude, an on-the-low spot where he replenishes his otherworldly energies.

And tonight's mission is just as important: He has to find his Clarks. Not only can you tell much about a man's roots by how he grounds his feet to the Earth, there's much to be said about a man who wears Clarks with a suit. "Bad-bwoy style," he intones, brushing up the black suede Wallabees, before glaring into the mirror for a final self-appraisal. It's on.

That night, at the Tunnel, he huddles with the masses, doing "real nigga" things—popping Mo', bobbing to the beat, and playing the wall when necessary. Yeah, he's a writer-producer-MC-arranger-musician with an enviable résumé, but he's still at that tenuous point in his career when posing nude with the wrong material girl or dancing for the wrong Colonel could result in the revocation of the all-important ghetto pass. He's a rock 'n' roll icon/hip hop highball with a pop superstar rim shot. But you're probably more impressed by that than he is.

"As long as you give him a guitar, he's singing, he's happy," says Claudenette. "And anything that come around it—materialistic things, money—is just a blessing. If you take his music away from him, I think he'll be a miserable man."

"I'm like a lamb, but I have the fury of a lion," Clef says. "I'm all about peace and unity and whatever, but I still have the fury of a lion, and I express that lionism through my music. You ain't gonna hear about Clef did this or he bagged up this person. You'll hear about what show he did." □

TREBLE CLEF: "I'm all about peace, but I still have the fury of a lion."



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**SEEKING REFUGE
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DEMANDS OF
SUPERSTARDOM,
GOSSIP JOCKS,
AND ASSORTED
BUSYBODIES,
LAURYN HILL,
ONE FABULOUS
THIRD OF THE
FUGEES, HAS GONE
HOME. SHE TELLS
KAREN R. GOOD
ABOUT HER NEW
ALBUM, NEW BABY,
AND WHAT IT
FEELS LIKE TO
EXPERIENCE TRUE....**





There are children here in South Orange, New Jersey. Every-where. Most of them go undercover and are strong. A red brick house, humble but many burdens have been laid off, had to peer into the black Room of Pain (pulling in the driveway), but you fight it, Valerie Hill looks like the best. Her daughter, Lauryn, is the best. Valerie is watching Valerie's grandson, one-year-old Zion David, called Z. He's a happy baby who glances long, like he knows something you don't. "Been doing this since he was born," Lauryn will later explain. Zion's eyes, dewy and tremulant, belong to his mother and his Uncle Malaney—soft, yet no qual, unshelterable. "Some want to play young Lauryn like the dumb," she says on her first single, "Lost One," off her solo album, *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill* (Ruffhouse/Columbia). Lauryn is young, but soon she will be a sage.

It was Lauryn's wrath-wrought chat and song that spirited her into our consciousness via the multipatinum, richly talented *Jughead*. A day away from putting the final touches to *Miseducation*—named after Carter G. Woodson's *The Miseducation of the Negro* (Communication Systems) and the 1974 film *The Education of Sonny Wortzik* (Paramount)—one of hip-hop's most respected microphonic controllers chooses to outstretch

her arms in the idea of normalcy, doing the thing young mothers and grandmothers do. Here, then, comes something magic.

Lauryn besters gracefully in *hazad* five-inch silhouettes. "Oh, I have those fetish," she'll admit later in the kitchen, with a coy tilt of the head. Locks gathered on top of her head, baby positioned on her hip, she gets with a quick hello and walks into this brick house where she was raised and still lives (though now that's also her mother's five minutes away that she bought for her parents). The place where her birthday parties played out and family reunions went on, she says, "Give me time to get it together," she says, which means catch her breath, perhaps, and pass Zion to her mama, who'll feed him sweet potato. The front steps will do nicely, for we plan to speak easy. I pull out my Bible and Lauryn turns to Psalm 73, the one of even if we have to sometimes shade our eyes from the shining.

Adapt—a poetic, musical complaint and fable of a sickly choir. "Read this," Lauryn says, "and I'll be right back." She disappears inside only to check on Zion.

The Word follows: "But as for me, my feet were almost gone, my steps had well high slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.... But when I thought to know this, it was too painful for me.... But God is

the strength of my heart, and my portion forever."

The last time I saw Lauryn Hill was at Reggie Sunsplash in Ocho Rios this past February. Mother Booker's boy, Robert Nesta Marley, would have turned 53; so all his possibilities were occasioned with the glory and contradiction that marry royalty to celebrity. The Marley family crossed over to the venue in wooden nightboats painted red, yellow, and green. The 17 Threes looked like brides in tatars, scarves, and flecks of gold. "Bufo soldier!" they sang. "Dreadlock Rasta!" and saluted. Bob's sons are beautiful and virile; Rohan Marley, Zion's father and Lauryn's love, is no exception. He watched her backstage as Lauryn joined the Melody Makers, marching and chatting in the language of emancipation. "Happy birthday, Bob Marley!" Lauryn offered, then remembered "mi neoborn son," and rewound: "Happy birthday, Grandpa! Respect!"

Lauryn Hill comes back, settles on the steps. As conversation unfolds, freckled and Afroed childhood friends will stop by with jokes and stories that will include a little girl who is a gold chainplate necklace that spells DENESHA, and another girl-child, cornrowed, with a note that says she just finished

baby-sitting class. "Come on in!" Lauryn will yell from the steps to waving neighbors in passing cars. "You gotta meet the baby!" To these folks, Lauryn has always been a star. She proves you can go home again. It's okay, even, to want to. Maybe even necessary.

L.H.: I take my music seriously. There's nothing fictional about what I'm doing. Everything I write, everything I say, is a profession. You're not going to hear me talk about what I have—and what you don't have. My role is to communicate what I experience to the greater world. To me, *Miseducation* is about me becoming aware of the things I was really naive to. I really wasn't thinking about doing a solo album. A lot of people told me to do it.

People were trying to make you do R&B? Or stick with hip hop?

Some were like, "Girl, just sing." And then you had the people who always thought I was in the wrong crew. There was always a lot of energy for me to do something solo, but to me, it was a little bit negative. It was flattering, but it was like, "Cross them cats; get rid of them." But that's not me. I'm not a jump-shop type of person.

That must have made you feel uncomfortable.

Very. But I was young and naive, and it caused some stress within the group. I felt that because I paid no attention to it; that meant other people didn't pay attention to it. Who knows what insecurities are in the minds of people because of what someone says? In my mind, I was happy because those were my boys; we grew up together. I loved them very much. But, you know, the hill looks different depending on where you're standing—if you're at the bottom or at the top or in the middle.

Everybody knew those comments wounded, that they were painful. I chose to ignore them. But it did cause some strain. I think it made [Wyclef and Pras] feel like they had to champion other agendas.

"I HAVE SO MANY FRIENDS WHO SAY I WANNA BE A SINGER. AND I SAY PLEASE DON'T LET THAT BE YOUR FINAL GOAL IN LIFE, 'CAUSE YOU'LL BE SO DISAPPOINTED."

Like, just in case I did jump ship, everybody else was going to be all right. The world was a little bit late in discovering the talents of Wyclef. I think they get it now.

People thought Pras and Clef were just throwaways? Mmm-mmhm. But love and competition really can't coexist in a relationship. So we had to work at that. "Cause it's either I love you, respect you,

and I want you to be happy and win—or it's, Yo, you're my competitor.

And you being the only woman—

Because I was one female and I was surrounded by guys, I got so much attention. We all existed in denial for a while. But when you're in denial, you're sort of stagnant. We stayed on tour for a long time. Tour is interesting because it ain't home, which means it's not reality. It's the road. Every night you play for an audience that's clapping for what you do, so you have this warped sense of self. And when I came home—not because I really wanted to but because I was forced to [by the pregnancy]—I was able to watch Wyclef and everything that went on from the outside in, and

stagnant for the sake of promoting this "group collective effort"? I was so busy trying to convince the world of how strong we were as a unit.

How tough of a realization was it?

You know what it is? It's kinda like realizing the Easter Bunny is fictional. You go from this naïveté to like, "Wow, okay. This is how it works. My energy has always been very idealistic. I've always been in this record business loving what I do, but it was the world. If it didn't work for me, there were other options.

I wonder how you manage to stay grounded. You're not on no superstar thing.

I actually resent superstardom, because with that comes a lot of shit. Not because I don't want my music to travel across the world—but I'm not a superstar, I don't fit the profile. I can't come into a photo shoot and rip through clothes and holler at people. I think there are people who play that role because they think that's the prerequisite. And that if you're actually cordial and nice and polite, people'll walk over you. But there's a lot of truth to that. People do take kindness for weakness. Especially when they're female. So a lot of women feel like they have to overcompensate.

Even after selling [seventeen] million records, I still have to convince people that I'm a self-contained unit. I think part of it had to do with the fact that I was with a group of guys who, for some reason, were perceived as being the breath and the life and the reason I do what I do. Granted, we worked very hard together, but I was also an individual, as much as I was part of a group. I think everybody looked at me and thought that because I was such a cheerleader, and because I championed the group so strongly, they thought I had no legs to stand on.

You said in your new song, "Ex-Factor": "How you gonna win / When you ain't right within?"

That's going back to the road, and you can stay there for a long time. But when you come home, you gotta come home. That's only a metaphor for karma. And that's why the seventy-third Psalm is so significant.

"I was envious of the foolish when I saw the prosperity of the wicked."

You have a lot of people who chase this thing with no end and no morals. As if people with money are better than people without. It's a dangerous way to live your life.

I remember when you were on the radio and that whole [former WQHT Hot 97 gossip jock] Wendy Williams thing was going on. She was asking and asking if you were pregnant. You said to her, "I know this is your job, but this is my life."

I was in the woman's face, and there was no compassion whatsoever. But people who show no compassion will be shown no compassion. I was twenty-one years old. I was happy and confused at the same time. I was trying to figure out what to do with my life. But for some reason, because I was young and successful, that made my personal life something for everybody to know.

How much do you think you're responsible for going to the world?

L-BOOGIE UP IN HERE
Rehearsing for the MTV Movie Awards



now I thank God.

What did you see?

I saw how they welcome you into Jerusalem only to crucify you. I remember seeing the publicity and the energy go from like, "You thought the girl was all that? Here's the guy who really sings." I was just like, *Whaaaaa!* It was a lot of introspection that went on. I said okay, have I been



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BLACK MAGIC WOMAN

"How these babies come to us and through us—it's hard to put into words. It's the highest form of unconditional love."

I'm very clear, especially now, that I live my life for God. I love humanity, and every day that's a struggle because the devil—I mean those negative forces—they're always out there trying to give you reasons not to love humanity. It makes you say, Let me go up in my house, close my door, turn my TV on, hug my boyfriend, and hold my child.

Let's talk about the album. That guitar on the song "To Zion" is amazing.

I've always adored Carlos Santana and considered him a true master. It actually started out for me when I was little. I had his *Abraxas* (Amenia) album. This is how I'm as weird as I am. I was fooling around in the basement one day, I think I was six or seven years old, and I found a 45. I didn't have any records at the time, and I thought it was the most beautiful thing I ever heard. It was so old, it had my mother's name on it from his school. There was always music in my house.

Did you wear your own little group?

Please. *Did I?* We had so many names I don't remember them all. I was always very dramatic. I was very ridiculous. You know when you're just happy to sing?

Everything I do I try to do from the heart. What gets me upset in music right now is that we're so hidden behind this whole "I'm trying to be cool and I have to look flawless." But humanity...just by definition, we're not flawless.

Folks are trying awfully hard to be polished.

When I worked on "The Sweetest Thing," I

because he's a musician.

What is genius to you? Because I read about you being labeled a "diva."

Yeah, but you know what? Underneath it is "Bitch!" Understand, it's not, "You're dope." It's, "Girl, you can sing—*Bitch!*" Aretha Franklin asked me, "What made you decide to sing?" I said, Well, I knew what I wanted to hear, so why not? She said, "Yeah, basically, that's what I used to do with [Atlantic Records exec] Jerry Wexler, but he always got the credit." I started bugging out. I said, So you mean people didn't think for you? That's when I realized. Record companies are always talking about how they make women. She'll be the next...*what-eva-er*. Brothers are allowed to be kooky and zany and quirky. Diva is just so unspecific. It's like, "What does she do?" "She divas."

Do you feel sexy?

Yes—I'm gonna tell you why—especially after having a child. There'll be little changes, but I actually feel more attractive now than I did before. I probably weigh the same, but something happens; you just start growing in other places.

I never wanted to be perceived as not being sexy or as being matronly. Please perceive me as a mother. I've always tried to be perceived as a mother of someone—a mother of a nation, a mother of people, a mother of love.

I remember that's another thing you said to Wendy Williams: "I'm always with child."

Always. But don't make me matronly. I'm twenty-three years old, and I'm blessed to have

has to be over.

Onstage with the Fugees you always seemed like you were holding something back.

But, remember, there was a lot of shared energy there. It was very important for my brothers to shine. And I think for a period of time, I was almost afraid to shine.

Were you afraid of your own power?

I think I was. I think people were afraid of my power.

Will there be another Fugees album?

Yeah...I think there will be. I definitely think there will be. We just gotta get into a room to do it.

Do you see each other a lot?

Right now we don't. Clef is doing *The Carnival* (Ruffhouse/Columbia, 1997); Pras is doing his album. And, you know, I assumed the domestic role for a minute, and then I went headfirst into the studio. It had to do a lot with my personal development. I learned some really incredible things about myself.

Like what?

My capacity, my threshold for pain, and my threshold for creativity. I was very blessed to have done this album by myself. I wasn't going to say, you know, Clef, come off the road and let's do this.

They're not on the album at all?

No, they're not. Only because it's kinda out of context. Because the album is so narrative. I think every woman goes through a relationship

"EVEN AFTER SELLING [SEVENTEEN] MILLION RECORDS, I STILL HAVE TO CONVINCe PEOPLE THAT I'M A SELF-CONTAINED UNIT. I THINK BECAUSE I CHAMPIONED THE GROUP SO STRONGLY, EVERYBODY THOUGHT I HAD NO LEGS TO STAND ON."

remember people were like, "What you talking bout? That song is crazy." I was like, Why? You never fell in love? But for some reason there's a level of embarrassment. I appreciate the fact that Mary J. Blige has been honest about her relationships on record. She, like, [sings] "Every day it rains." And I feel that, because it's not always perfect.

"A Rose Is Still a Rose" (Arista, 1998) is the first time I heard Aretha use her range in a long time.

Aretha's so *baaad*. When I wrote the song—the rhythm, the syncopation is definitely hip hop—I expected to have to really go through it with her. But she took the demo version, came in the studio, and it was done.

How do you approach producing someone like Aretha?

I wanna bring the musicianship, the songwriting, back to hip hop. Drums gotta be hard. They gotta be banging. But I want changes. When I went to the bridge in "Sweetest Thing," people thought I was crazy. "What the hell is that?" I said, It's a change. Remember? They used to have those in songs back in the day. There's no reason why Carlos Santana can't pick the hip hop drums—

a child so young because I have a mother in my life and I have the energy. Even though I'm twenty-three, I'm sort of a traveled twenty-three. When I was nineteen, I was like, Wow, what else can I do besides have a family? I mean, after you do so much at a young age, you start to realize it's not about doing so much. I have so many friends and associates who say I wanna be a singer. I wanna do this and that. And I say please don't let that be your final goal in life 'cause you'll be so disappointed. There's very little security in the hip hop game.

The life spans is, like, three albums.

Memmo—that's horrible. I hope not. I don't think so. We have a lot of plaques, but you'll never see me hang them up, because I don't want to be complacent. I wanna always feel like I can sing this better. And my record company, they're supportive, but I think there's a little "Come on, Lauryn, let's do another 'Killing Me Softly.'" And I'm saying, Let me be young.

Right now I have time to build, and I'm not afraid. My family foundation is very strong, and for a minute I'm not popular—which is very likely—it's not the world to me. I don't feel like my life

which is a great lesson in love. I had gone through one earlier, and it was kinda like my therapy to write about it. I made peace when I created these songs. I've revealed myself because I'm an honest musician.

There was a rumor that Wyclef and you were going out.

Well, you know what? All of us in the group were very close. I don't have a response to that one. We were a dynamic group in the sense that we grew up together. So there will be a lot of love there.

There was a manbunt: Who is Lauryn's baby's daddy?

I thought that was nuts, by the way. I guess people'd never seen me with a brother in public—other than the guys.

Was it hard for the public to see you as a woman? As a real woman? Yeah. [She laughs] I'm allowed a personal life. [Long pause] If you're a man in the music business, there's girls throwing their panties at you. And you can either accept it or reject it, and most of the time they accept it because they've never had that much overwhelming attention in their lives. For women in the music business, it's

very different. Men are often intimidated by you, or they're crazy. So it's not easy to make connections with real people.

I value the relationships that exist outside this industry. Those people, they just want my attention and my love. So when I try to save my relationships from the media attention, what I'm doing is saving that dynamic.

You know, my boyfriend [Rohan] is like that. I enjoy us going places and not being chased. Or us goin' places and girls not hawking him because he's my man. We're very happy, but we're still very private. I still don't like to talk about it. Not because I don't love him extremely and he doesn't love me, but because I want to love him away from the lights, camera, action. And I want him to love me away from all that. And that's hard when you're all up in it. Mary J. Blige and I were talking about competitive relationships, and they just don't work. It's like, if I can give, please give back. Please.

How was it working with her? She's on the album, right?

Oh yeah. Mary, she's my sister. I love Mary. I feel like I grew up with her, like I know her. She's so familiar to me, and that's what people love about her: that she's so familiar. When she sings, she feels it. It's not about perfection. That's the difference between the method and the heart. She strikes that chord.

Speaking of songs from the heart, I wanted to talk to you about "To Zion."

The lyrics came from when I was sick with the flu and I was terrified because I thought I was gonna give

it to him. My mother was like, "Relax." And those lyrics just came to me. "Unsure of what the balance held / I touched my belly overwhelmed / By what I had been chosen to perform." Um, I gotta sing it. [She sings] "But then an angel came one day"—sure did. "Told me to kneel down and pray / For unto me a man-child would be born / Woe this crazy circumstance / I knew his life deserved a chance / But everybody told me to be smart / "Look at your career," they said / Laury, baby, use your head / But instead I chose to use my heart / Now the joy of my world is in Zion."

Zion, the deliverer.

Names wouldn't come when I was getting ready to have him. The only name that came to me was Zion. I was like, Is Zion too much of a weight to carry? But this little boy, man. I would say he personally delivered me from emotional and spiritual drought. He just replenished my newness. When he was born, I almost felt like I was born again.

Was he in the studio when you sang that song?

Oh, all the time. It's extraordinary how these babies are created, and they come to us and through



BLUNTED ON REALITY
The Fugees backstage at the 24th American Music Awards, January 1997

PHOTOGRAPH BY TOMMY

have opposition. You have to be well prepared. A lot of rappers are very young. And what we exist on is our energy and our fire. It may be naïve, but

HIP HOP HAS THE POTENTIAL TO BE A GREAT FORUM. WE HAVE OUR OWN FORM OF COMMUNICATION. BUT IT'S A LOT EASIER TO RIDE THE MIDDLE. ONCE YOU STAND FOR SOMETHING, THAT MEANS YOU HAVE OPPOSITION.



SPREAD LOVE
Lauryn and a fan at the Homecoming concert in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 1997

us. It's hard to put into words. Trust me when I say this, it is the highest form of unconditional love that you can ever feel. When you have a child, it makes you see the flaws in some of your other relationships. There is nothing he could do that would stop me from loving him.

I wanted you to respond to a quote by M.O.P.: "Is this hip hop? / Hell no, this is war / I been trying to tell you that since 'How About Some Hardcore.'"

Yeah, I remember that line. Mmmm-hmmm. I think people tend to underutilize hip hop. I think hip hop can bring our agenda to the front, but we talk about a bunch of nothing rather than talk about real issues. Hip hop has the potential to be a great forum. We have our own form of communication. But it's a lot easier to ride the middle. Once you stand for something, that means you

sometimes when we're in the public, we just start speaking about what we feel is right.

Do you have an agenda with your music?

I want to empower. I want to inform. I want to inspire.

Inspiration is so important.

It is—because there were so many things in my life that inspired me to be the person I am today. That's the motivation that inspires us to create. Zion is my inspiration.

I was not raised to be beautiful and not say it. I was not raised to have grievance and not cry out. Some people would prefer to say, "Be pretty and don't talk too much." But you gotta keep talking, or people forget about you and your agenda. My agenda is to make sure that we're taken care of, and educated, and healthy, and happy.

And you're happy?

I'm very happy. With a foundation, with a good man and a child, and a family—and I don't have the fear of losing my job. You know how in the office space people are sometimes hesitant to be vocal 'cause they could be fired for what they say? The only person who can fire me is God. ☐

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**THE CLIMATE
OF HIP HOP
IS ABOUT TO
CHANGE
FOREVER
TRY NOT TO SWEAT...**

The background of the entire page is a vibrant, high-contrast image of flames in shades of orange, yellow, and red. Overlaid on this is a dark silhouette of a human skull, which serves as a central graphic element. The text is positioned in the center and lower half of the image.

BLAZE

the fifth element of hip hop

Summer '98

a magazine. a mentality. a mission.



IMMORTAL

Torrance, California. The children of the Dragon have gathered for the second annual Jun Fan Jeet Kune Do memorial dinner honoring the late, great Bruce Lee and his son, Brandon, who died in 1993. As this year marks the 25th anniversary of Bruce's passing, attendance is high, eclipsing totals from the dinner's debut the year before. The corridors of the Torrance Marriott are filled with men and women in kung fu gear: rubber-soled slippers, loose black pants, and T-shirts bearing the names of martial arts schools from around the world.

Sprinkled among the fans and followers are B-movie heroes, ultimate fighting champions, veteran kung fu masters. But the heavy hitters in the halls constantly orbited by eager crowds are the members of the Jun Fan Jeet Kune Do Nucleus, an organization composed of Lee's family, his closest friends, and his most cherished students (think Jesus and the Apostles). To those who have come in remembrance of Bruce, the Nucleus are the fortunate few who learned at the master's feet, who knew him as flesh and blood.

Some Nucleus members enjoy the attention, while others seem overwhelmed by the demands of starry-eyed autograph seekers. Taky Kimura falls into the latter category. A graying Japanese-American man in his mid-sixties, Kimura is quiet and distant, almost somber. He was Bruce's closest companion during his early adult years and served as best man at Bruce's wedding in 1964. When he arrives, he's instantly surrounded by admirers. Taky, they ask, *what was Bruce like? Taky, how did you meet him? And then: Taky, tell us your best memory of Bruce!*

"I remember," he says slowly, "I remember that he was a very good friend." And he slips into a side room, escaping the hordes in the hall.

Where legends are concerned, death is an inconvenience—a speed bump on the road to a higher plane of being. So it is with Bruce Lee: A quarter century after his passage, the Dragon continues to rise. His movies are as popular as ever on video. Lee's "way of the fist," Jeet Kune Do, remains one of the world's most

revered fighting disciplines. And Lee's image—the steel-eyed face set in a rictus of killing rage, sweat beading on his brow and blood pouring from razor cuts on his chest—has entered into the collective unconsciousness. It's Jimmy Dean posing with a lit cigarette. It's Marilyn Monroe with her skin blown high. It's Malcolm at the window, rifle in hand. Lee the actor, the fighter, the teacher, is a phenomenon. An icon.

It's easy to forget that myths start out as men, that there is a life behind the legend. Lee was born in San Francisco in the Year of the Dragon, at the Hour of the Dragon, on November 27, 1940. (In Chinese astrology, the Dragon is the most potent of signs, to be a double Dragon is to be destined for greatness. Lee's mother and father—the latter a well-known Beijing opera singer who was

touring California at the time of Lee's birth—feared that evil spirits might take their newborn son because their first child had died shortly after delivery.

To fool the demons, they pierced Lee's ears, and called him by a female nickname, *Siu Fong*, meaning "Little Phoenix." The trick worked. He grew into a restless, noisy, and temperamental kid, leading his parents to change his nickname to the one he would later make famous: *Siu Lung*—"Little Dragon."

By the time he was a teen, Lee had embraced thug life. He began running a gang on Perth Street, a narrow alley near La Salle College, the Jesuit school he attended in Hong Kong. He and his crew would defend their turf against white boys, *goyas*, who dared to show their pale faces in Perth territory. In case he got jumped while alone, he took to wearing a steel chain around his waist—an efficient, instant weapon.

But a steel chain wasn't much help against the forces of the mob. "One day I found Bruce cowering in a corner of a classroom, and I told him to get out. I didn't know he was in danger," recalls Brother Henry, one of Lee's old teachers. "I found out that he had picked a fight with the son of a chief of the Triads [Hong Kong's infamous criminal brotherhood]."

As a result of Bruce's trouble on the streets, his parents made two decisions that would

BY
JEFF
YANG

Twenty-five years after Bruce Lee's death, it's still his show. We're just playin' in it. A look at the eternal legacy of the man called Dragon

FISTS OF FEAR VS. THE JURY

How do martial arts movie masters really stack up? We checked with the experts—Ric Meyers, author of the forthcoming *Great Martial Arts Movies: From Bruce Lee to Jackie Chan and Beyond* (Citadel Press), and Vincent Lynn, martial arts instructor and costar of Jackie Chan's *Operation Condor*—to get the inside scoop on who's breaking and who's faking. **J.Y.**



BRUCE LEE

Jackie Chan

JET LI

MICHELLE YEOH

CHUCK NORRIS

"THE DRAGON" WILSON

STEVEN SEAGAL

JEAN-CLAUDE VAN DAMME

	BRUCE LEE	Jackie Chan	JET LI	MICHELLE YEOH	CHUCK NORRIS	"THE DRAGON" WILSON	STEVEN SEAGAL	JEAN-CLAUDE VAN DAMME
STYLE	Jeet Kune Do, a healthy knowledge of everything else	Being Operative-style Wushu (and then Shaolin acrobatics)	Traditional Wushu	California style (no traditional martial arts training)	Karate	Kickboxing, some Kung Fu	Allydoo, mending staves	Belgian Fū (he's allegedly a kick-boxer, but little will come out to support this)
LAST SEEN	1973's <i>Enter the Dragon</i>	1991's <i>Mr. Nice Guy</i> , with <i>Fun Rush Hour</i> (coming this month)	<i>Let Her Walk</i> (if bombing this summer)	1997's <i>Tomorrow Never Dies</i>	<i>Walker, Texas Ranger</i> (season began in 1993)	Who can tell?	1997's <i>Fire Down Below</i>	1997's <i>Double Team</i> , directed by Tobi Hark, costarring Dennis Rodman
BEST FIGHT	The Coliseum fight with Chuck Norris in 1972's <i>Return of the Dragon</i> , in which Bruce rips off a fistful of Chuck's chest hair and contemptuously blows it away	The psycho ultimatum brawl in 1994's <i>Drunken Master II</i> . "You can watch it frame by frame and still not get it all. And remember, that guy's 34 years old!" —VL	The glorious combat sequence in 1996's <i>Brave Warrior</i> , in which Li displays everything in his repertoire, from Yimg Chun to Tai Chi-inspired finger attacks. "It's the only one of these guys who's brought real martial arts to the movies." —VL	The opening sequence in 1996's <i>Brave Warrior</i> , in which she shows a plane hijacking in <i>Hard 2 to Kill</i> : "She's the real deal. Entire period!" —RM	The final duel in 1980's <i>The Octagon</i> , in which Norris plays a modern ninja. "It's probably the best movie he's ever done. Even if he did have to use a sword to get the job done." —VL	"All of his fights are the same." —VL	"The kitchen battle with William Forsythe in 1991's <i>For the Love of Justice</i> ." "Seagal just destroys him—everything Forsythe tries to do, Seagal turns it against him, and then he slams him with every cooking implement in the book. Like the Spatula of Death." —RM	"Something from 1981's <i>Bloodsport</i> ! Guess, I don't know. He's a professional, but a particularly nice one. He's a tough nut to crack, but all I suggest I shouldn't say anything else." —VL
SIGNATURE MOVE	The flying side kick. Wo TAAAAAAAH	Prop-foz. Jackie comes up with everything in sight, from food to furniture.	The No-Shadow Kick, a wire-assisted flying kick that drops about a dozen footprints on the unlucky victim's chest as the course of a single attack.	The reverse face kick, an amazingly effective jab (and fu) in which Michelle goes to full extension while facing away from her opponent, foot up over one of the shoulders and breaking her victim's teeth.	The roundhouse spin kick. Norris was the first to use this move in competition and continued to perform it with great effectiveness on camera.	Don doesn't have any "Wilson" the generic stuff. He's like "Stops and Shop" brand "Martial Arts!" "The kind that'll perform in a white box with black lettering." —RM	The elbow snep, in which Seagal grabs on to an opponent's neck and dislocates their forearm with a searing crunch.	The slow-motion after kick. After rates this move with his patented six-expanding leg split, a technique that showcases the delicate core of the Belgian body.
ON-SCREEN COMBAT-ABILITY (1-10 FISTS)	10. "Most of the other guys were just going to for the movies. Bruce was a warrior." —RM	9.5. "He has agility, and imagination, and there's no question that he could destroy any American screen martial artist. Plus, he could make you die laughing." —RM	9.5. "If Jackie Chan is Savon Glover, Jet Li is Mikhail Baryshnikov. They're both great fighters and the other a classically trained artist. And remember, Jackie started learning his skills at seven years old. Jet started at the age of four." —RM	8. "Michelle is really a dancer by training, so she has balance, flexibility, agility, and power. In a real street fight, though, she'd leave it to her bodyguard." —VL	6.5. "Chuck is the only big American martial arts art or with competition. The man's a seven-time world karate champion. Too bad that after 1986 he Code of Silence, he decided to take the cash and go lowball. I mean, <i>Snake Eyes</i> ? <i>Top Dog</i> ?" —RM	4. "You may think, 'What the hell is he doing, calling?' Handle the <i>Dragon</i> , too! Don earned the fame in the '70s. He was, like, 50 martial arts championships." "His big idea was to 'make fights look more like real' fights. But no one wants to sit there for 60 minutes of real fighting unless it's <i>Johnny Springer</i> ." —VL	3. "Seagal used to be a very good martial artist—fast and deadly. But what happened? He's a pig now. He's always wailing because that's the way of 'written' in the script." —RM	2. "It's a fuck, boxer, I'm a kick-boxer. Hell, I can't even get on the place. The only reason he wasn't his movies is because that's the way of 'written' in the script." —RM
PROGNOSIS	Dead, but still the King.	The Energizer Bunny of martial arts events, he keeps going, and going, and going.	Hasn't fully mastered English, but communicates impressively (though sign language—great punchee, round-house kicks to the windpipe, etc.) Hollywood Jet has landed.	Because she's substantially more feral than any of the other people on this list, her future seems bright. Watch as Yeoh burn-suggests the Hollywood show.	His managed to keep his career going longer than any other American martial arts hero—well into his fifties. But nothing lasts forever. Will <i>Walker, Texas Ranger</i> ever be being <i>Texas Ranger With a Walker</i> ?	Don gets no respect for his "cosily at right the tape chops. Rent any <i>Black</i> with a name like <i>Bloodsport Part 35</i> , and you've just bought a one-way ticket to <i>Wileonnie</i> ."	To dispute the collapse of his physical skills, Seagal turned to spiritual enlightenment, claiming to have a restricted Tibetan laser. Wants to play <i>God of War</i> in his next movie, if he can find a horse that can carry him without snapping like a pretzel slice.	His next film, also directed by Tobi Hark, costarring the only Hong Kong filmmaker who hasn't "knew" have to work with him again, is about terrorists who threaten to implant explosives in designer jeans. Tuff said.



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change his life. The first was to give him training in self-defense under the famed Grand Master of Wing Chun kung fu, Yip Man. The second was to send the 18-year-old when even the long arm of the Triads was unlikely to touch him: the country of his birth, America.

Once Lee arrived in the States, he found new ways to channel his inner fire. He studied philosophy at the University of Washington. He courted a brunette code named Linda Emery. He began teaching the fighting arts he'd learned from his venerable master. Upon graduation, Bruce and Linda married and moved to Oakland, where Lee opened his first kung fu school.

It was then that Lee's transformation from man into myth began. Enraged that Lee dared to teach the secrets of Chinese martial arts to "foreign devils," the masters of the great kung fu schools sent a representative to challenge him in single combat. No one knows exactly how or when the challenge went down. All that is known is that Lee triumphed, winning the right to teach students without concern for color, creed, or country of origin. "Racial barriers do not exist," said Lee in 1972 to an interviewer in Hong Kong who asked why he married a white woman, why he befriended Japanese and Koreans and Filipinos, why his earliest students were black. "Everyone under the sun is a member of a universal family."

When Lee first went to Hollywood in the mid-60s, he was treated as a second-class citizen. After landing a gig as Kato, the hard-hitting sidekick to Van Williams in *The Green Hornet* TV series (1966-1967), Lee came up with the idea for a show about a martial artist in the Old West. Producers loved the concept but told him that people didn't want to see yellow faces in movies. They cast David Carradine in *Kung Fu*, in the role Lee envisioned for himself. So Lee went back to Hong Kong and became a superstar, blowing away box office records in films like *Fists of Fury* (1971), *The Chinese Connection* (1972), and *Return of the Dragon* (1973).

Then he returned to America and said, "This time I want control," says John Little, editor of several volumes of Lee's writings published by Charles E. Tuttle. Bruce's own production company, Concord, was a full partner with Warner Bros. in his final, and greatest film, *Enter the Dragon*. Made for just \$600,000, it has since grossed more than \$300 million. It also gave birth to a new kind of colored hero.

Bruce Lee no protests or parades. He did not deliver sermons or engage in debates. But he opened up martial arts to the world, and he opened up Hollywood to the martial arts, reinventing action cinema. And, as the first nonwhite international screen icon, he did as much to break the color line as any who fought for racial equality in the streets or in the courts. "Everyone's very aware of what Rosa Parks did, but as far as popular culture is concerned, Bruce was the guy," says Little.

Asians were the first to embrace Lee, but they were far from alone. Black militants of the era took to his arts as a secret weapon against the abuses of the Man. The infant Hip Hop Nation assimilated his killer style as its own—which is why break dancing is Jeet Kune Do plus drum machine, and why MCs like Busta Rhymes still pay tribute to him in

videos (see the clip for "Dangerous") circa 1998.

"Back in the early '70s, half the guys I knew in the Bronx were walking around in Chinese kung fu outfits," says Wesley Snipes, a student of the African-Brazilian martial art *Capoeira*. "Everybody loved Bruce. Everybody wanted to be Bruce."

Lee told interviewers that money was secondary to the pursuit of self-perfection, yet he wrote in his journal in 1969 that his "Definite Chief Aim" was to be "the highest paid Oriental superstar in the United States.... Starting in 1970, I will achieve world fame, and from then onward till the end of 1980 I will have in my possession ten million dollars." The year he died, he was in the process of trading in his Mercedes 350SL convertible for a gold Rolls Royce Comiche.

He preached the need for inner harmony, but when he burst into action, the feral look in his eyes was real. Martial arts superstar Jackie Chan, who worked as an extra on *Enter the Dragon*, recalls how Lee smashed him in the face with a fighting stick during a stunt battle, knocking him out. Lee spent

"The end of heroes is the same as ordinary men," Lee would often say. "They all die and gradually fade away in the memory of man."

the rest of the day apologizing to Jackie for losing control. "He was very kind to me," says Chan, "but you wouldn't believe how much that hurt."

Lee's contradictions seem dueless to hypocrisy than to a ruthless drive to achieve perfection, even at the expense of sacred cows. In inventing Jeet Kune Do, he took the lean and lethal kung fu style known as Wing Chun and stripped it down to the primal beats. Ninety-nine percent of kung fu is bullsh*t, he implied in a 1968 interview. "It's fancy jazz. It looks good, but it doesn't work. If you want something beautiful, take modern dancing." When asked by an interviewer, a woman, what style she should use if she were attacked by a 250-pound guy, he snorted and told her to kick him in the balls and run like hell.

Because the art of Jeet Kune Do was motivated by practicality, it evolved like hip hop: It began in the old school—sparse, freestyle, with nothing separating the master from the rhythm. And then, only after locking down the basics, did Lee start sampling the best of what other disciplines had to offer, biting on world flavors like Muay Thai, jiu jitsu, and taekwon do. Even toward the end of his days, Lee was still remixing.

Robert Clouse, director of *Enter the Dragon*, remembers walking in on Bruce to find him studying intently a film clip of Muhammad Ali. "They say somebody that I may have to fight him," Lee explained. When asked if he thought he could beat Ali, he laughed and pointed to his fists. "Look at these. These are little Chinese hands. He'd kill me."

Maybe. Maybe not. According to his friends and students, Lee could throw 13 punches in half a second. His kicks had enough power to make a 250-pound bag swing up flush against the ceiling. He could do 20 one-finger push-ups, and he could toss a grain of rice in the air and catch it with a pair of chopsticks. He could twist his body and whip his muscles with such incredible force that a punch from just one inch away could send a man flying 16 feet. Some real-life superhero shit.

The tales of his physical prowess, the odd circumstances of his birth, his larger-than-life image—when Lee died suddenly at the age of 32, all of the ingredients were there for the creation of a cult. On July 20, 1973, Lee was visiting the Hong Kong apartment of an actress friend when he complained of a headache, took a painkiller, and lay down on her bed. He never woke up, and British coroners were at a loss as to the cause of his demise, finally labeling it a case of "misadventure" (in other words, an unexplained death).

Conspiracy theories emerged, suggesting that

Bruce had been done to by vengeful Shaolin masters. Or by the Triads. Or by the evil spirits he'd dodged at his birth. The whispers got louder when Bruce's son Brandon was killed in a freak gun accident on the set of his film *The Crow*. For Shannon Lee, Brandon's sister and Bruce's sole surviving heir, the stories are chilling. Having embarked on an action career herself—her first major feature, *Baywatch* and *Now You're Dead*, just finished shooting in Prague—the last thing Shannon wants to hear are intimations that her father was something more than mortal. Like the rumors that Bruce isn't dead at all, that, like King Arthur, Elvis, and Tupac Shakur, he's simply in hiding, waiting for the right time to return.

"It's weird, sometimes," she says, "the way people talk about him. One of my costars came over to me and said, 'In Hong Kong, your father's like a god.' What am I supposed to say to that? Does that make me the Daughter of God?"

If you'd called him a god to his face, Lee would have kicked your ass. He put little stock in hero worship: "The end of heroes is the same as ordinary men," he'd often say. "They all die and gradually fade away in the memory of man."

But 25 years after his death, Bruce Lee's still kicking it; he's still the benchmark of deadly cool, giving power to boasts like those bused by Da Coca-Cola Brolawz—"Same height, same weight, same fight skills." As Bruce Lee!

Some heroes fade away, but the Dragon lives on. *Kiyaaaaaaaaiiiii!* ☐

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"NOBODY IN HIP HOP HAS DEVOTED A WHOLE ALBUM TO RELATIONSHIPS AND THE EMOTION OF LOVE," SAYS Q-TIP. "JUST FROM THAT MATTER ALONE, WE'RE THE BRAVEST IN THE GAME."

"Everybody gets into doin' so much comparative studiyin' that they tend not to let each joint live on its own. This album is different—and change is good. I take it," he says in a paused, hushed tone, "you don't like it."

Tip hears from me the truth: Oh, no, there's hot stuff on this album.

And there is some. From the lady-loving lushness of "Common Ground" and "Like It Like That" to the chatter-bop showdown between the Tribesters, Busta Rhymes, and Redman on "Stepping It Up," *Movement* packs enough heat to keep trucks moving. But after producing four albums—each jammed with its own distinct sound—Tribe seems to have settled for a solid standard of boom. Though the Beats are pleasing but don't really take you any higher, they're still ATCQ—one of the most revered, original, and consistently dope groups in hip-hop history.

"I take it that, overall, you think the new album's so-so," says Tip, probing. "I take it you think the last album was the same way."

Ahh, yes, the last album, *Beats, Rhymes and Life*. The follow-up to the breathtaking *Midnight Marauders* (1992). Usually critics' darlings, Tribe garnered mixed reviews for the first time with *Beats*—yet it debuted at No. 1 on *Billboard's* pop charts. While critics boo-hoed, "This is nowhere as good as *People's Instinctive Travels and the Paths of Rhythm* (1990) or the brilliant *Low End Theory* (1991)," die-hard fans pushed *Beats* to platinum.

"I can't really sit back and say *Beats* was a mistake," says Phife from his shotgun position. "Everything with us wasn't happy-go-lucky and fun as it was on *Midnight or Love End or People's*. Tip had just turned Muslim after *Midnight*, I moved to Atlanta. Now we plannin' on havin' families. We got to be adults—whether we rappin' or not."

At this point, the spotless dark vehicle is double-parked in front of local superdrio station (WQHT) Hot 97. From the driver's seat, Tip beckons a station employee smoking a cigarette on her break. "This is a writer," Tip says to the staffer. "He's about to bash us in VIBE." Everybody chuckles, but it's nervous laughter.

"I'm just rippin' you, kid," Tip finally says. "You know what I feel like? All I can do is make the best shit I can. And if we have to change, then we change. If people can't change along with us, I guess that was just the way it was destined to be. I feel very strong about this album. Love it."

Tip is craning his neck to communicate with this VIBE scribe in the back seat, so he never sees the dread-headed figure bum-rush the window.

☞oooooooooooo, whatsisnamepppp?

Tip turns round and comes face to face with Hip Hop—you know, Kris "KRS-One" Parker. Today, the radio station—visiting Blastmaster is holder not of a boulder, but of a message.

"So what's up, man? What happened to the house?" KRS asks.

"My shit burned down," says Q-Tip.

"Yo, that's good luck, man. Fire means transformation," replies a solemn Parker. "Hell yeah. That shit it dope. That means the new shit is bangin'!"

"Exactly, exactly," says Tip, not brightening a bit. "Thank you."

Even among his peers, Q-Tip is reserved and awfully quiet. Figuring out the human Rubik's Cube that is Q-Tip can be quite a chore. Try to gauge exactly how he feels about losing his crib and a 5,000-strong record collection to an electrical fire, and his demeanor provides few clues. Five years ago, Jonathan Davis III hid adie to the weedout, the females, and crazy prophylactics and converted to the Muslim faith. In that time, Kamaal Fareed has emerged—a man attempting to take the righteous road by way of a shady showbiz detour. An artist looking to live peacefully in a world where kids in Jonesboro, Arkansas catch bad ones over playground beef and rap icons get put to rest over ill communications.

"Everything is so decadent and vain," says Q-Tip as he navigates his whip. "People do things for the love of money or for the love of sex rather than for the love of love. I mean, niggas talk about love of Rollies and bubbly and all that. Nobody in hip hop has devoted a whole album to relationships and the emotion of love. Just from that matter alone, we're the bravest niggas in the game."

As we chug along Manhattan's choppy West Side Highway, the moment seems right—after talk of valor and love—to slip in questions about Tip's tender relationship with the *bonita* apple of his eye—Hot 97 personality Angie Martinez.

VIBE: *Tribe has made classic albums—*

Q-TIP: "Except this one, right?"

But instead of talking about music, a lot of people were like, 'Yo, ask Tip about Angie.'

It's Phife who answers as we land at Chelsea Piers—N.Y.C.'s mall of fun and fitness. "I don't care if Tip went out with Melba Moore. That's his business. If he feels' somebody like that, if he gonna get married, whatever, let him do his thing. That shit is corny. Ask him about Angie."

Meet Malik, the Five Foot Freak. Never one to mince words, the smooth-as-butter Phife has a bust-a-nut-in-your-eye-to-show-you-where-I-come-from approach to life. That's right. He gives it to you raw—like that OJ Bastard. An avid sports fiend, here at Chelsea, Phife Dog bowls to win, even amid the high school students, families, and office workers frolicking in this yuppiefied haven of indoor rock climbing, batting cages, and bowling alleys.

"We always put the group first. I'm still workin' on my solo joint, but the most important thing to me right now is this album," says ATCQ's most mobile member, who spends a lot of time in Indianapolis watching his hometown home, Colts running back Marshall Faulk, do his thing.

"I'm learning the agency business," continues Phife, who also frequently treks out to St. Louis to work with Edge Sports, a team of football agents expanding into the music field. More pins fall to the ground. "Hopefully, if I have my way, I can get my license soon and start recruiting, or be a sports broadcaster for college basketball."

Phife excuses himself and rolls a strike. Matter of fact, he gets hot and hits three in a row until this inter-

viewer mentions his streak. The next time up—gutterball. The food that was ordered—french fries, chicken nuggets—arrives. Tip, who had been looking a bit haggard and had no interest in the game, is suddenly invigorated.

"This is the album I feel real close to," he says. Tip then starts talking about a car accident he was in last winter. "I almost died on New Year's Eve. B—in the motherfuckin' car. *Boom!* I'm in the hospital with a concussion. Nigger come out. Then, a month later, it was 8:30 in the motherfuckin' mornin'. Just got finished beefin' with my girl; my roommate in another room and shit. I happen to wake up. And... fuckin'... I'm smelli' smoke.... I mean, we didn't think we wuz gonna make it."

He breaks out of whatever zone he was temporarily trapped within and shrugs.

"I gotta reevaluate everything in my life. Everything," Tip states. "Cause the Creator just don't let you go through those two things like that and just bring you out of it. I'm here for a purpose, and my purpose is to make music. And the shit is, I'm not tryin' to be the best. I just want my place to shine."

The magnificent sun that today brought in is shining no longer. A hreezy night has fallen on the metropolis, and Queens represents Tip and Phife as heading home. But Brooklyn is still in the house, as the scene shifts back to the mild-mannered Al Shaheed Muhammad.

At River Sound Studios, he's in charge of overseeing a session with R&B singer Eric Benét. Here, while in full Ummah effect (Ummah being the production team of Muhammad, Q-Tip, and Detroit native Jay Dee), the recently married Al delves into the maturation of Tribe's sound. It was while working with Tony! Toni! Tone! on their 1993 *Sons of Soul* (Wing/Mercury) that Al realized the full potential of meshing traditional hip-hop production with live instrumentation. "I'd just hooked this beat up, and they just picked up their instruments and started playing," he recalls. "Raphael [Saadiq] was singing, and as soon as he touched the bass, it just blew me away."

The experience brought him full circle with his Bedford-Stuyvesant instapast. In junior high, Al was playing the clarinet and saxophone but stopped when he got heavy into deejaying. Ahh, yes, things were so simple then. All doesn't have much love for the kind of rap that currently gets radio airplay, though.

"Our job as Tribe is not done," Al says with mellow scorns. "I hear people say ignorant things. It's cool to have a Mercedes, nice jewelry, and a big home; but to be arrogant and flamboyant with it, at a cost of another human being's feelings, it ain't cool, man. That just makes you ugly and evil. And even if we're not standing on the corner selling dope, walking around with the biggest jewels and the million-dollar videos, I still believe in A Tribe Called Quest and what we stand for." Thankfully, Tribe are still spreading love. And that's a beautiful thing. ▀

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B O D Y C O U N T

WELCOME TO HUNTSVILLE, TEXAS: DEATH CITY, U. S. A.

It was 6:35 p.m. on March 11, 1998, and Jerry Lee Hogue lay atop a crisp, white sheet, staring at the ceiling of Texas's execution chamber. He felt eight leather straps digging into his legs, arms, and hefty torso, tying him to a hard metal table. Hogue's eyes darted nervously around the tiny room, and he wigged his fingers, as if to remind himself that he were still alive.

The 47-year-old convicted murderer blinked hard, turned his head to the right, and started shouting at a slight, middle-aged woman named Mary Beth Crawford, who stood several feet away behind a thick glass pane. More than 19 years ago, Hogue had pointed a gun at Crawford, forced her to perform oral sex, plunged a butcher knife into her stomach, tied her up, torched her house, and left her to die. The blaze killed Crawford's roommate, 27-year-old Jayne Markham, leading a Fort Worth jury to convict Hogue of capital murder.

So, on this day, Hogue found himself on a cross-shaped gurney with IV tubes stuck in his splayed arms. Still he insisted he was innocent, that Crawford had fingered the wrong guy. "I don't know why you are doing this, but I'm going to forgive you," Hogue yelled to Crawford, who began sobbing. "You are lucky you're still alive.... You can still stop this." Silently watching this one-way conversation were Hogue's attorney, two friends, a chaplain, five reporters, a warden, and two spokesmen for the prison system.

It was now 6:42 p.m., and the condemned man was running out of time. "All right, warden," he said. "I love you all. Bye-bye." The warden gave the signal

to his drug team, who watched from behind a one-way mirror to preserve their anonymity. Hogue closed his eyes as a lethal solution flowed into his veins. A few moments later, the silence was interrupted as Hogue's last breath sputtered noisily out of his body.

Hogue was the 12th person to be put to death in 1998, and his execution is just one of dozens that will take place across the United States this year. Over the past two decades, the number of people executed has climbed steadily from one in 1977 to 73 in 1997. Twenty-nine states have put to death more than 450 people since the Supreme Court reinstated the death penalty in 1976. Texas, more than any other state, is responsible for driving up this body count.

Texas smashed the annual record for the most people put to death by one state when it executed 37 men last year; four during a single week last May. A month later, two executions were carried out on the same evening. All the state's executions take place in Huntsville, earning the east Texas town the unflattering title Execution Capital of the World. Since 1982, more than 150 prisoners have been put to death here, behind the brick walls of the Huntsville Unit prison and out of the sight of local teenagers licking ice cream cones at the Dairy Queen across the street.

Huntsville is the quintessential prison town. More than 7,000 of Huntsville's 35,000 residents—20 percent of the town's population—live behind bars. Greyhound buses packed with just-released inmates roll out of town every few hours. Inmates in their "prison whites" trim bushes while

guards in chalk gray uniforms head home for the night. Eight correctional facilities—plus the administrative offices of the state's prison system—lie in and around Huntsville. The prison industry is the town's largest employer—delivering \$18 million in monthly paychecks to nearly 6,700 county residents. Huntsville even boasts a prison museum that features "Old Sparky," the chair once used to electrocute 36 inmates.

Why has Texas become the nation's leading executioner? Zealous prosecutors, conservative appeals courts, and overwhelming public support for the death penalty have all played a part. A strong "victims' rights" movement has also helped fuel this pro-capital punishment sentiment. After watching Hogue die, Crawford held a press conference to express relief that her former assailant had been executed. "It's reaffirmed my faith in the judicial system," she said. But for many Huntsville residents, the executions do not bring a sense of closure. Slowly, some townspeople are realizing that the death penalty affects not only those who kill but also those who keep on living.

As the country grows numb to the rising rate of executions, the debate over the death penalty is transformed from rhetoric to reality. For a handful of townspeople—chaplains, spokesmen, prisoners, protestors—this death penalty drama has defined not only the town's reputation but also their own lives. No statistics can calculate the psychological impact of executions on these people who are so intimately involved. But as Huntsville's mayor, William B. Green, says, "It's hard to feel good about 'Hey, we're executing someone.'

BY JENNIFER GONNERMAN

THE SPOKESMAN

David Nunnelee, 42, is the public face of the busiest death row in America. For 12 years, he has worked in the public information office of the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ), where he describes himself as "low man on the totem pole." Nunnelee's

DAVID NUNNELEE SMOOKES ANOTHER BUST.



duties include setting up prison interviews, answering reporter's questions, giving tours of death row, and attending executions. So far, he has watched 132 men and one woman die.

When Nunnelee first quit his job as a reporter to join the TDCJ, he spent his days calmly typing up press releases and answering the occasional phone call. But with the increased rate of executions, his job has become tougher. Close to 50 reporters phone Nunnelee every day, many from countries like Norway and Switzerland, where there is no death penalty. These reporters are not Nunnelee's favorites. "They're very biased," he says. "The thing that pisses me off is that they only care about one side of the story. They tend to ignore the victims of these people on death row, and that's frustrating."

Job stress has led Nunnelee to smoke even more than his usual two packs a day. But less than an hour before Hogue's execution, Nunnelee appears relaxed as he sits behind his desk sipping a Diet Coke. Tonight won't be particularly traumatic for Nunnelee. "If I passed by, I'd say a few things to him," he says of the condemned prisoner, "but he wasn't a guy that I would go by his cell to see how he was." The spokesman is wearing a blazer and tie instead of his trademark navy windbreaker with the TDCJ logo. On execution days, Nunnelee explains, "I try to dress respectfully."

At 6:05 p.m., the call comes. Nunnelee picks up his black phone and learns that Hogue's final appeals have been rejected. He leads the reporters across the street, through the Huntsville Unit prison and into the execution room. While Hogue receives a lethal injection, Nunnelee stands in the back of the witness room, scribbling notes with a pencil so he can describe the scene to reporters who did not attend.

Nunnelee was not quite so calm on the night of

February 3, 1998, when prison officials executed Karla Faye Tucker, 38, the first woman put to death in Texas in more than a century. Tucker had received a death sentence 15 years earlier for helping to kill two people with a pickax. But since converting to Christianity soon after her arrest, she had married a minister and begun leading a peaceful, devout life.

In the weeks before her death, Tucker sparked an international media frenzy. Interviews with high-profile television personalities such as Larry King transformed her from an anonymous inmate to a cause célèbre. Thousands of people wrote to Texas governor George W. Bush begging him to step in and stop Tucker's execution, but he refused.

More than 200 journalists, hundreds of protesters, and 25 satellite trucks camped out on the street in front of the Huntsville Unit prison on the evening of Tucker's execution. After it was carried out, television stations broadcast Nunnelee's matter-of-fact account

around the world. "Karla Faye Tucker has been executed by lethal injection for the crime of capital murder," he announced. "She was pronounced dead at 6:45 p.m.... Twenty seconds into the execution, she coughed twice, let out a soft drone, and then went silent."

What the millions of people watching could not

have known was how much this execution had been eating at Nunnelee. During those final weeks, his job had been to coordinate Tucker's many press appearances. He spent a lot of time with Tucker, who would always inquire about his health and give him a big hug. "I liked her," Nunnelee says. "She was very personable, very easy to talk to, very down-to-earth. And she never changed." He pauses. Then he says, "My greatest fear was seeing her strapped down on the gurney and how that was going to affect me."

Indeed, a few nights after her death, Tucker popped up in Nunnelee's dreams. He dreamed that she had showed up at her own execution—not as the condemned inmate, but as a reporter. Weeks after Tucker's death, Nunnelee still vividly recalls their final encounter, when it was uncertain if the governor would commute her sentence. "She asked me what I thought, and I told her I didn't think she was going to make it," Nunnelee says. "I was always honest with her." Tears begin to fill Nunnelee's eyes. Instead of dabbing them with the Kleenex in his fist, he

squeezes the tissue harder. "I just wished her the best and lugged her," he says. "And I left."

THE PRISONER

Thomas Joe Miller-El never met Karla Faye Tucker, but her execution erased the last shreds of hope from his heart. "I knew at that moment when Karla Faye Tucker was executed—a white woman, born-again-Christian, very attractive—that everyone on death row, except maybe the rats and the roaches, will be killed," says Miller-El, speaking through the steel-laced glass that separates condemned inmates from visitors at the Ellis Unit prison in Huntsville. "It's just a matter of time."

Miller-El, 47, became death row inmate No. 834 in 1986, after he was convicted of fatally shooting a Holiday Inn clerk, 25-year-old Douglas Walker, as he lay bound and gagged on the floor of a closet. According to trial testimony, Miller-El shot in the back another clerk, 29-year-old Donald Ray Hall, who was left paralyzed from the chest down. Miller-El and his wife stole about \$3,000 from the motel near Dallas before fleeing. At the time, Miller-El had already spent a decade in prison for bank robbery and burglary.

On death row, Miller-El seems to fancy himself Texas's version of Mumia Abu-Jamal, the convicted murderer whose name has become a rallying cry for "political prisoners." Miller-El also calls himself a political prisoner, and he hopes to stop his execution by convincing a Federal appeals court that the jury selection in his trial was tainted by racial discrimination. Miller-El knows that African-Americans like himself account for more than 40 percent of the nation's death row inmates, although they comprise just 12 percent of the population. "At one

THOMAS JOE MILLER-EL AWAILS ANOTHER EXECUTION DATE.





MUSIC TV

Bad
Boy

time, I thought that race was the real big issue," he says about the people who wind up on death row. "But now I think something that plays a bigger part than race is class."

"IT DOESN'T MATTER TO ME WHETHER IT'S CHARLES MANSON OR ADOLF HITLER," SAYS LONGMIRE. "I STILL DON'T THINK WE SHOULD KILL 'EM."

Miller-El is smarter than most of the men on the row, and he is determined to get his message out. He has given more than 75 media interviews and has his own home page on the Internet. But in recent years, he has lost much of his zest for fighting. Now, there are specks of white in Miller-El's closely cropped hair. His six-foot-four-inch frame slumps forward in a tired posture that screams defeat. And Miller-El has abandoned much of his daily routine, which once included reading newspapers, practicing yoga, and writing his pen pals.

What has killed Miller-El's thirst for life is the looming fear of death. In the past few years, he has lived through to execution dates. Once he came so close to being executed that a guard asked him how he wanted to dispose of his body. Miller-El won a stay of execution each time. "If I live out this year, I'll be really lucky," he says. "And if I get next year, I'll be really shocked."

The day of Hogue's death started like any other for Miller-El. He woke at 7:00 a.m. in his cluttered eight-by-10-foot cell, in which he keeps a Smith-Corona typewriter, an accordion file stuffed with legal papers, a copy of *Jet* magazine, and a book of Moslem verses. After sewing pockets on prison uniforms in death row's garment factory, Miller-El went outside to the recreation yard, where he glimpsed a white van with a TDCJ seal on it pass by. "There goes the van to go get Jerry," Miller-El told his fellow inmates. They all heard, but no one responded. Miller-El even bumped into Hogue around 1:00 p.m., while guards were shackling him for his trip to the execution chamber. "I told him I loved him," Miller-El says. "And I kept walking."

Miller-El estimates that he has known 125 of the more than 150 Texas prisoners executed in recent years. Hogue, who had served time for rape before he got to death row, helped Miller-El with his court appeals and wrote an article titled "A Review of the Anti-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996" for a death row publication. Miller-El describes Hogue as "a very jolly person" with a knack for constructing elaborate models of boats and motorcycles out of toothpicks.

If Hogue had been executed several years ago, Miller-El might have rallied the other inmates to protest. There was a time when death row prisoners went on hunger strikes, refused to go out in the yard, or read the names of the deceased to one another in order to mark an execution. But, like the rest of the nation, the inmates have grown numb to the quickening pace of executions. "You kinda learn to put your feelings on a shelf," Miller-El says. "It'll drive you crazy if you become so affected emotionally."

So, on the evening of Hogue's execution, Miller-El found himself carrying out his nightly duties as a prison porter. At 6:00 p.m., the scheduled time for

executions, he put down his broom and glanced at his digital watch. Another four hours passed before he heard from a guard that Hogue had been killed. Then Miller-El trudged back to his cell, climbed into

his cot, and tried to sleep, wondering if his next execution date would be his last.

THE PROTESTER

When Hogue died, Dennis Longmire was standing on the sidewalk outside the Huntsville Unit prison with his hands cupped around a white candle, trying to stop the wind from extinguishing its flame. In the eyes of anti-death penalty activists, Longmire is the conscience of Huntsville. A professor at nearby Sam Houston State University, Longmire, 46, is the only townsman who regularly demonstrates against the executions. Tonight, 12 protesters—the relatives of men on death row, a few people from the Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty—join him at the corner of Avenue I and 12th Street.

Yellow tape separates the demonstrators from the prison. An officer in a cowboy hat guards the tape to ensure the protesters keep their distance. Longmire arrives shortly before 6:00 p.m. and keeps his gaze fixed on the prison entrance to see when Nunnelec

after 14 years in Huntsville, he considers himself a true Texan. Still, he doesn't always fit in. For starters, Longmire isn't the most popular professor at the criminal justice college where he teach-

es. "Most undergraduates avoid me," he says. "They believe my position on the death penalty is fundamentally wrong." Sometimes, the more fervent capital punishment supporters drive by Longmire's protests, leaning out the car window and shouting "Kill the motherfucker!"

Longmire hopes his demonstrating will make a difference, or at least jolt his fellow residents into realizing what's going on in their own downtown. "There's a great power of denial," he says. "Huntsville doesn't openly embrace being the execution capital of the world. Most people don't talk about it. And most people are agitated or irritated that the media keeps asking them questions about it."

Longmire's style is nonconfrontational. Instead of bringing a placard, he stands next to the corner's stop sign, which he imagines is his own symbolic message. The rest of the demonstrators are also fairly tame, though there have been raucous confrontations in the past. Longmire once broke up a knife fight between drunken college students and the brother of an inmate who was being executed.



DENNIS LONGMIRE LIGHTS ANOTHER CANDLE.

will lead in the media witnesses. While he waits on the sidewalk, Longmire prays silently.

With a salt-and-pepper beard and green socks poking out from his Birkenstocks, Longmire looks like the East Coast intellectual he once was. But

Sometimes members of the National Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty bring a megaphone and launch into high-decibel rants. A favorite chant likens the state's death penalty chamber to Nazi concentration camps. "Auschwitz, Buchenwald, Hunts-



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vile!" the protesters shout. Longmire does not join in. "I don't personally believe that what we're doing is anywhere near Buchenwald and Auschwitz yet," he says. "I think doing that only alienates rather than solidifies opposition."

Like virtually all the protesters on the corner tonight, Longmire doesn't know Hogue. In fact, he does not know any of the inmates on the row. "My opposition to the death penalty is not about them," says Longmire, who is a devout Catholic. "It doesn't matter to me who we are about to kill—whether that person is Charles Manson or Adolf Hitler or Karla Tucker or an innocent person. I still don't think we should kill 'em."

The increased pace of executions throughout 1997 meant that Longmire had to leave work early more often and spend more time in front of his word processor adding chapters to his journal. After each execution, he types up a factual account of what he has witnessed, including details about how many demonstrators showed up and how many reporters he talked to. Longmire says he may publish his writings some day, but his journal is also a coping strategy—a way to try to make sense of this steady stream of state-sanctioned deaths.

Outside the building where Hogue is being executed, the professor waits until the witnesses leave the prison before he concludes his protest. Then he blows out his candle and drives home.

THE CHAPLAIN

James Brazzil's workday on March 11, 1998 didn't end until after Hogue was dead. Brazzil is the chaplain for the 1,700 men imprisoned inside the Huntsville Unit. He conducts religious services, notifies them whenever a family member passes away, and presides at their burial if they die while incarcerated and their family does not claim the body. The most taxing part of Brazzil's job, however, is consoling death row inmates during their final hours.

Over the past two years, Brazzil has sat with more than 50 prisoners while they waited to die. Shortly after



Brazzil spent 25 years preaching in four different Southern Baptist churches before he began participating in Texas's execution process in 1995. Now, he wears a prison identification card clipped to his shirt and is considered an official employee of the TDCJ. He's only 48 years old, but with his deep wrinkles, he could easily pass for a decade older. Brazzil jokes that the job has made his ulcers act up and quickened his hair loss. Last year, he admits, was especially tough. "Emotionally, it will absolutely drain you, especially when you have four or five in a row on an everyday basis," Brazzil says. "Watching a man die is never easy."

The chaplain and warden are the only two people inside the execution room at the time of an inmate's death. But according to Joe Fernald, a warden at the Huntsville Unit, "The most important guy in the whole execution process is the chaplain. The rest of us are bit

If I come out and say I'm against the death penalty, then I'm taking sides against the state. It puts me in a very awkward situation. So I have to keep my feelings to myself."

But it isn't always easy to avoid the tense political debate swirling around capital punishment. Since Huntsville started attracting international press attention, Brazzil has received angry letters and faxes from death penalty opponents in New Zealand, France, England, Spain, and Italy. "People think we Texans here are brutal and a bunch of hard-hearted murderers," Brazzil says. "But the people I work with are not that way at all. They take their job seriously. No one gets any pleasure out of it."

At 6:20 p.m. on March 11, 1998, Brazzil was by Hogue's side as a five-person "tie-down team" escorted him into the execution room and strapped him onto the gurney. The chaplain placed his palm on

"EMOTIONALLY, IT WILL ABSOLUTELY DRAIN YOU," SAYS CHAPLAIN JAMES BRAZZIL. "ESPECIALLY WHEN YOU HAVE FOUR OR FIVE IN A ROW ON AN EVERYDAY BASIS. WATCHING A MAN DIE IS NEVER EASY."

noon on the day of a scheduled execution, prison guards lead the condemned inmate into the death house. They strip-search him, lock him in a cell, and then leave him alone with Brazzil. Each prisoner copes differently. Some talk about fishing or football. Others ask for help writing a letter to their family. Like many inmates, Hogue talked to Brazzil about his relationship with God. Karla Faye Tucker was the only inmate to pull off an extralong strand of toilet paper, carefully fold it, and then tie a makeshift ribbon in her hair. "Whenever a person gets within a few hours of death, there are no more walls," the chaplain says. "You don't play any more games. You don't have to hold up any kind of facade. In those few hours, you can get closer to a person than you can sometimes in years."

players. He administers to their spiritual needs in their last hours on Earth. Brazzil also serves a more worldly purpose. Fernald says, "From a practical standpoint, it also assists in calming the inmate."

Brazzil doesn't admit to having any qualms about his job. "I try not to think about whether or not the death penalty is right or wrong," Brazzil says. "I'm just here for the inmate, and I try to do my job the best I can." When asked whether he supports capital punishment, Brazzil refuses to answer. "If I come out and say I'm for the death penalty and the guys read that in the magazine—and they read everything—then my ministry is ruined," the chaplain says. "Who wants to share with somebody and unload with somebody who is saying they believe in the death penalty? But

Hogue's right leg just before the inmate shouted his final statement. "Some of them say, 'I feel so lonely up here,' so I squeeze their leg to let them know I'm there." Brazzil says. Eight long, silent minutes passed between when the lethal injection started and when a doctor entered the room to confirm Hogue's death. The chaplain didn't take his hand off the prisoner until after he was dead.

It is unlikely that many people in Huntsville knew that a man was being put to death in their town that evening. Nevertheless, Brazzil says, "The media is always talking about how the people of Huntsville are so cold. But that's not true at all, because they really do care, and the more I'm in this town the more I realize how much caring there is." □



MUSIC TELEVISION



FOR POU POU

**BIG PUN AND FAT JOE ARE
TOGETHER, THESE BRONX
LUSCIOUS LATINO FLAVOR.**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY

W *hoooooooooataaaa!*™ says Fat
Joe as he watches a neon-colored cartoon character jump

off a bridge. Eyes wide and mouth open, he's hawking a television in the living room of his small one-bedroom condo in the Throgs Neck area of the Bronx. Since the half-Puerto Rican and half-Cuban rapper is terrified of heights—and refuses to fly in airplanes—watching the animated leap delivers some sweat to his dome. No one would have anticipated

JND JND

MORE THAN BIG POPPAS. HEAVYWEIGHTS SERVE UP MIMI VALDÉS WEIGHS IN. PIOTR SIKORA

this kind of reaction from one of the few rappers who's lived the ill rhymes he recites. "Yo, I got problems, man," he says, giggling. "I was definitely the type of kid that would climb up a tree and then be too scared to come down."

When Joseph Anthony Cartagena landed on the hip hop scene with a major label, in 1993, all the odds were against him. At the time, aside from Cypress Hill, no Latino lyricists were making any *real* noise. Joey was just another streetwise fat cat with *obag* rhyme



skills. Nevertheless, his first single, "Flow Joe" (Violator/Relativity, 1993), hit No. 1 on the rap charts that year. "Everybody knows Fat Joe's in town / Nuff respect from the Boogie Down," screamed Cartagena on the slow, thumping track. He was determined to go from ghetto mouthpiece to hip hop superstar.

But the 27-year-old MC's got much on his mind this Saturday afternoon; Joe's attention is divided between the always ringing phone and the television's remote. He's thinking about important things—Fat Joe's protégé, Big Pun, has a show to do in Delaware tonight. Questions, questions. Joe is scrambling to figure out whether he should accompany Pun or put in an honest day's work with his street team, who are on a mission to make his own Fat Joe sticker campaign (for his third LP, *Don Cartagena*) an equal or better effort than what he and the crew did for Punisher (whose stickers could be found on highway exit signs, public lamp-posts, and anything not moving).

"We're painting big walls that look like the sticker all over the city," Joe says. And there hasn't been any beef with the cops just yet. Joe has convinced various building owners that his murals will look much better than the crude tags that presently scar their properties.

After deciding to make it a night of promo for self, Joe has his girlfriend find his work uniform—a hoodie and worn-out sneakers. He then jumps into his black 500SEL Benzino with the caramel leather interior. On the way to Pun's crib, we drive along the Cross Bronx Expressway to check a piece that is near completion. It's drizzling, but two kids continue painting the four-story design. "I got this idea from the Ruthless Records commercial where the guy with sunglasses sees the label's poster everywhere. And that's my goal," says Joe, a sometime graffitiist himself, "—to be everywhere."

As Joe's hooptie-deluxe pulls up near Pun's rented limo, a tinted window slides down to reveal an incredibly chubbey hand encircled by a \$17,000 Cuban link bracelet that reads BIG PUN in ice. It sparkles brighter than the streetlights above. Joe shakes his head with disapproval; his eyes are saying that it is a little excessive for a new artist to purchase such an extravagant item—before receiving a royalty check.

But there's no question that Christopher Carlos Rios is destined for ridiculous success. He's not just a dope Latino MC; he's a rapper's rapper armed with chilling, detailed stories that are backed by a non-stop, attack-the-track flow. *Gente like Power Rule*, *Mellow Man Ace*, *Geraldo*, *Kid Frost*, *Kurious Jorge*, *Tito* (from *Fearless Four*), and *Ruby D* (of *Fantastic Five*) might've caused some ripples, but aside from the fact they're Latino, none made any tidal waves. Big Punisher can rip a track to *pedastros* and hit you with a party joint that'll shake your *cañito*. Of course,

this Boricua from the Boogie Down Bronx will remind many of the late, forever great Notorious B.I.G. The two have similar personalities—charming, funny, and genuinely concerned with winning both underground and mainstream hip hop fans. Biggie's irreplaceable, unbelievable, but Pun's not a bad alternative.

Pun's first foray into the rap game was in a group called Full of Clips (his name at the time: Big Moon

One's Emcy [Violator/Relativity, 1995]). The result was "Watch Out," which featured Terror Squad members Armageddon and Keith Nut. Nowadays, Pun's scorching "Still Not a Player" single gets more play than Yankee stadium.

The true test of a rapper's longevity is how efficiently he or she can rock in person. With this said—all fat jokes aside—I'm sure that more than a few of you out there are wondering if this rather large MC can perform live, go the distance, and not pass out from exhaustion. Although Big Punisher weighs in at 450 pounds-plus and oftentimes seems to be struggling for breath, he holds his own onstage at Wilmington, Delaware's Continental Ballroom (well, actually, he gets by with a little help from his friends Cuban and Prospect, who reinforce Pun's vocal barrage). Inside, while the intimately packed crowd of about 300 yell "Helloware!" nonstop, Pun and his charged hype men satisfy the audience. Who said Latinos can't tear shit down?

When it's all over, Pun and his peoples linger, signing autographs on dollar bills, dancing, and talking with some cluckie-cluck girls before stepping back to the limo for the long ride home. When we're a half hour away from the Bronx, Pun awakes to call his wife of eight years and jokingly advises her to get her "boyfriend" out of the house. "I'm giving you ample time," he warns. It's about 4 a.m. when we arrive, and Liza, a 25-year-old part-time college student and mother of his three children, just grins.

Growing up in the Bronx's Forest Projects, Joe witnessed hip hop's evolution in the first person. His brother, Angel, was even a crate boy (meaning he carried records) for Melle Mel and Grandmaster Flash. And while many love to refer to those early park-jam sessions and block parties as the good old days, some of us who witnessed the movement firsthand remember times being a tad bit iller. "Niggas was risking their lives just to hear hip hop," cause the radio wasn't playing it," Joe explains. "People talking about back then it was more positive? Get the fuck outta here! Niggas was shooting, robbing you, and taking sneakers right the fuck off your feet!"

Fat Joe was one of those sinister shorties. "I started flipping on the kids who were bothering me," says Joe, who claims that he was teased *mucho* as a youth because of his portly frame. "People started to get scared when I was around, and I felt a certain power to it. I did a lot of things I ain't too proud to talk about," he admits, "and there's people in the neighborhood now who still might be like, 'That nigga is crazy.'"

When childhood friend Lord Finesse got signed to Wild Pitch Records in 1989, Joe figured that he too would one day put his poetry on wax. Not every-



Dog), which consisted of the colossal one himself, and round-the-way friends Triple Seis, Cuban Link, and Prospect. A chance meeting with Fat Joe at a Bronx car wash soon after would put master rhymers to microphone.

"I saw them and just didn't like their appearance off the bat. I was like, Yo, that nigga Pun is just too big," Joe says. "I was already a fat Latino nigga rapping, so I didn't know if it could work for him too." To top it off, Pun had braids to his shoulders and rhymed about some Satanism/mass murder-type shit. "[But] at that moment, I knew Pun was phenomenal. He said this rhyme, and I was like, *Ooooooohhh!* I asked him to come to the studio the next day to drop it for my second album, *Jealous*

one was so sure that he was going to pull it off, though. "You know how every street hustler says he's gonna clean up his act? That was Joe," remembers Finesse. "I just couldn't take him seriously when he said he wanted to rhyme. He just seemed too into that life—jewels, getting dressed up—to be a struggling artist." But Joe wasted no time: He stepped to yet another neighborhood homie, producer *en fuego* Diamond D, and asked him for some demo beats. Fat Joe was for real about rap.

"I did Amateur Night at the Apollo and won, like, four weeks in a row! We ripped shit—me with two Spanish girls dancing," Joe says. Cool DJ Red Alert was in the house one of those talent show nights. Red, who was impressed by the fat man's skills, invited Joe to cut a radio promo for him. Of course, the hungry artist delivered it to him the next day.

"I judge promos like I judge records," Red says while checking out the Girbaud fall fashion show in Midtown Manhattan. "It's about the creativity. So if it's good, I'll play it. And Fat Joe sounded good." The third promo he recorded was atop the "Flow Joe" beat—which ended up being his first single and led to the solidification of his first deal with Violator/Relativity Records. But Joe's relationship with Relativity (which put out his *Represent* in 1993 and *Jealous One's Entry* in 1995) would eventually sour.

"They thought of me as an underground artist, and I got into this business to be a superstar, not an around-the-way rapper," he stresses. "My two kids got to eat off this. Plus, how humiliating is it to become a rapper and be back in the 'hood because you didn't make it, and niggas are snapping on you?" After discussing his disappointment, Joe says Relativity released him from his contract without a fight.

Not many recording artists can manage their own careers; thus, most don't fuss much with business ventures in general. But not if your name is Fat Joe, who owns a clothing store in the Bronx named after Nas's first solo cut (Halftime), a sportswear line (f560), politics record deals for his homeboy (Big Pun), and forges forward with a label of his own (Mystic Entertainment/Atlantic). When one does the math, it's easy to understand just why Joe might be a Latino Berry Gordy in the making.

Pun is extremely grateful that ambitious Joe is on his team. Then there's the *team* team, the Terror Squad (Cuban, Seis, Prospect,

If Punisher doesn't slice you...



...Fat Joe will dice you.



etc.)—their crew of MCs, muscle, money, reality. They're the people in Pun and Joe's life who keep them centered and on point—friends who don't hesitate to comment on Punisher's size. "All my peoples be like, 'Yo, lose some weight. You could be the next L.L.,'" Pun says days after the Delaware show (he recently lost 30 pounds and is hiring a nutritionist). "Steve Rifkind [president of Loud] offered me money to slim down." Pun, who used to be "cock-dick," says his present weight isn't the result of medical complications.

"When I was five, I broke my leg at this Manhattan building's playground. My mother sued them, and when I was nineteen, we finally won and got some money," he explains while watching MTV from the floor of his small living room. Until then, Pun had worked a series of odd jobs, and coming into the settlement money (close to a couple of hundred thousand dollars) was like winning the lottery.

"I thought I didn't have to work anymore," he says over a plate of General Tsao's chicken. "I bought two cars and was just feasting—eating, chilling, and not exercising." Pun even boxed before the massive weight gain.

"It kind of bugged me out, because when I was young, I was kind of special. I don't mean to brag, but I was so handsome," Pun says sheepishly. "[Now,] I'm attracted to every woman I meet. Intensely attracted. And I really started feeling that way after I gained my weight," he says. "I guess that's my way of looking for affection."

Well, if it's any consolation, Pun the MC is now getting some love: *Capital Punishment* (Loud) is a heavy plate of stinging beats and stunning rhymes—"You Came Up," featuring Notega; "Caribbean Connection," featuring Wyclef Jean; and "Super Lyrical." It debuted at No. 5 on *Billboard*'s pop chart and at No. 1 on its R&B and rap charts. And when Joe's *Don Cartagena* (Mystic Entertainment/Atlantic) drops in August, kids will find the same rawness that put him at the forefront of the sophisticated thug-core sound. It's danceable, but never corny, hip hop. It shows FJ's incredible development as a lyricist. Joints like "John Blaze," the all-star MC lineup featuring Nas, Pun, Jadakiss (from the Lox), and Raekwon; "Destiny," part two of "Twins" on Pun's album; and "Find Out" (produced by the one and only Marley Marl) are enough to soothe the true hip hop lover. Together, these wonderwuns complement each other. Fate introduced them and made each a better *hombie* and more equipped to shine. KRS-One said it best: The Bronx keeps creating it. □

Sean Combs' handpicked clique of producers rule radio waves with an iron

fist. But will Puffy's Hitmen for hire stay together—forever?

Chairman Mao studies their science



Mario Winans



Richard "Young Lord" Friserson



Anthony Dent

Money

POWERes



Hashem
Myrick



Daven "Prestige"
Vanderpool



Carl "Chucky"
Thompson



Ron "Amen-Ra"
Lawrence



Puff



Deric "D-Dot"
Angelettie



Jeffrey "J-Dub"
Walker

Producing is not 'looping up a record.' That don't make you a producer. All these cats sittin' at home with they MF-3000s and they new 2000s and they SP-12s and they 950s thinking they producers, they sadly mistaken. They're mad because they feel like [anyone] can rhyme over a loop. Okay, then rhyme over a loop. But when it doesn't sell, ask yourself why."

Deric Angelettie is reclining in a sofa seat in the MIDI room of Daddy's House—mentor Sean "Puff Daddy" Combs's Midtown Manhattan recording studio—but he may as well be kickin' it on a park bench in his native Crown Heights, Brooklyn. Looking up from the brim of his Yankees baseball cap, sipping Hennessy and Coke from a plastic cup, the 29-year-old Bad Boy Records producer of monster hits like Puff's "It's All About the Benjamins" and Mase's "Feel So Good" can afford the condescending words his

pect

gravely voice unleashes. After all, Angelette's whole crew is famous.

"Let me see you go up in the studio, coach vocals, mix a record, and add all the necessary shit you need to get them three thousand eight hundred [radio] spins a week," he says. "Puffy can do that. Deric Angelette can do that. Stevie J. can do that. Nasheim can do that. Ron Lawrence can do that. That's what makes us producers."

Confidence breeds jealousy. And if hip hop has achieved anything over the past couple of years, it's been the introduction into the general populace of some beautifully succulent "envy" vernacular. "Hate" is one such word. Never before in pop music history has an entity of music manufacturing been so playa-hated (at least by hip hop purists) as Combs's Bad Boy Entertainment family. Charged with everything from recklessly promoting materialism to possessing rudimentary vocal skills, Bad Boy chart toppers like Mase, the Lox, Total, and the Puff Ryder himself are often pegged by haters as lucky stowaway passengers on the career of Bad Boy's lone, truly genuine, *Titanic*-size talent: the eternally great Notorious B.I.G.

But the most common charge levied at Bad Boy by hatin' hip hop hedz is a moralistic one: that the label's "Don't worry, be happy—and dance!" aesthetic and lowest common denominator musical approach have killed hip hop's creativity and imagination. ("[Working with the Hitmen] helped my career," says Queens, New York-bred MC Mic Geronimo, whose recent single, "Nothin' Move but the Money," was molded by the HM. "My fans got to hear me over some tracks that I might not usually come with.") An abundance of remade hits (the unfortunate, huge-selling Bad Boy hip pop remixes of classics like the Police's 1979 "Roxanne" and the Jackson 5's 1970 "I Want You Back") and reused sample loops (affectionately known in the production world as jacks) have only fueled these accusations. As the dedicated studio rats behind Bad Boy's *Billboard* bum-rush, the Combs-managed production team known as the Hitmen stand directly within the crosshairs of such hate. Ten members deep and growing, their success rate is undeniable, but the battalion members' names having appeared, both alongside Puffy's and on their own, on virtually every hit, remixed or otherwise, that the label has generated.

And Bad Boy is only the beginning. As commissioned mercenaries outside the label, they've constructed hit singles for the likes of Jay-Z, the

Isley Brothers, L.L. Cool J., Mariah Carey, MC Lyte, New Edition, and SWV. Even if you've never heard of Deric "D-Dor" Angelette, Steven "Stevie J." Jordan, Nasheim Myrick, Ron "Amen-Ra" Lawrence, Carl "Chucky" Thompson, Daven "Prestige" Vanderpool, Mario Winans, Jeffrey "J-Dub" Walker, Anthony Dent, or Richard "Young Lord" Frierson, you've heard—and most likely danced, partied, or ballshitted to—their ubiquitous work.

"To truly be original," says Prestige, 23, "you'd have to listen to no music and you'd have to be away

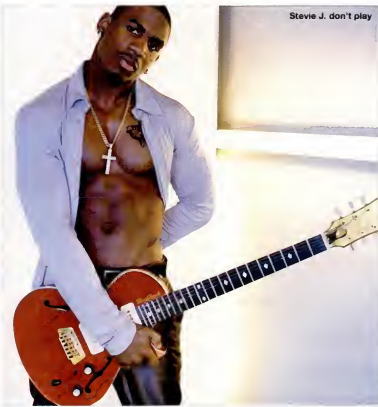
like Stevie Dan to me. So I wanna question that word original, really."

"If you go back and listen to the albums [we've worked on], most of the songs are not jacks," says Ron Lawrence, picking at his lunch in a sunny office at Manhattan's Universal Records. Along with former Howard University pal Angelette, the slim 32-year-old from East Elmhurst, Queens enjoyed brief notoriety in the early '90s Afrocentric rap duo Two Kings in a Cipher. Now, thumping club and radio staples like B.I.G.'s "Hypnotize." Tracey Lee's

"The Theme (It's Party Time)," and the Lox's "Money, Power & Respect" are Lawrence's bread and butter. "There are certain elements in a sample that we'll try to bring out, like the littlest high hat—things that help take the loop to the next level."

"If I get into a situation where I have to use a loop, I have to put my signature on it," explains Chucky Thompson, 29, from his home in Washington, D.C. (He first honed his chops while gigging with Chocolate City—area go-go bands.) Thompson's keyboard acuity and ear for lingering counter melodies helped construct the cornerstones of the Bad Boy sound on albums like Mary J. Blige's *My Life* and B.I.G.'s *Ready to Die* (both 1994). "I put myself in the position of the musicians that are actually on the samples. Try to envision me being in a room with them, and just catch their vibe."

The issue for hip hop purists, however, remains whether or not all this studio slickness has overtly sanitized an art form once represented by the raw beauty of two turntables and a microphone. "It all depends on the artist," says 24-



"There's a lot of times when the track would be finished and [Puff] would come in and be like, 'Put a cymbal here,' and then [he'd get] a coproduction credit," Stevie J. says with a laugh. "At first it was like, Damn! He ain't really doin' shit to be gettin' this coproduction! And then I had to think like, Yo, he put me in the game."

from the world." A longtime staple on the fledgling beatmaking circuit, the bespectacled Brooklynite got down with Combs's collective two years ago. Most recently, he's laced Jay-Z with the Foxy Brown/Babyface-assisted smash "Sunshine," a track built on the foundation of the Fearless Four's "Rockin' It."

"A lot of these rock people scream about 'originality,'" Prestige continues while flipping through records at a New York vintage vinyl spot. "They're not original. Take Jamiroquai—their stuff sounds

year-old multi-instrumentalist/producer Stevie J., whose vast range of credits include much of 112's 1996 self-titled debut, B.I.G.'s exuberant "Mo Money, Mo Problems," and Puff's global hit tribute record "I'll Be Missing You." "But I think it's right for rap. Wu-Tang like they beats raw. But I know it's gonna come a time when Method Man's gonna want a track that's gonna be mainstream. He's gonna want to sell four million units, and I think radio is just gonna accept only so much of [the RZA's] rawness."

PHOTOGRAPH BY JEFFREY M. HARRIS FOR ROLLING STONE

A close-up, low-angle shot of a hand pouring Gatorade from a bottle into the mouth of a person. The scene is dimly lit with warm, golden light, creating a dramatic and intimate atmosphere. The Gatorade bottle is the central focus, with its label clearly visible. The person's face is partially visible in the lower right, with their mouth open to receive the drink. The overall mood is one of refreshment and energy.

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Despite the blinding track record that has helped the collective live up to its billing, the Hitmen appear perpetually overshadowed by Puff. Though certainly effective in increasing the luster on his own star, did Puff's master plan also serve to reinforce the Hitmen's individual anonymity?

"At first, the media would say [we were] 'Puff's knob turners,'" Nashiem says wryly. "What the fuck is a knob turner? That's some subliminal bullshit right there! And then they seen giving us a little props after they seen us putting out hits by our selves."

For Stevie J., the early adjustment to working on "collaborative efforts" became an issue of proper credit on the records themselves. "There's a lot of times when the track would be finished and [Puff] would come in and be like, 'Just put a cymbal here,' and then [he'd get] a coproduction credit," Stevie remarks with a laugh. "At first it was like, 'Damn! He ain't really doing 'shit to be gettin' this coproduction! And then I had to think like, Yo, he put me in the game; he taught me a lot of things. So it was like, 'Well, I'll take it.'"

Rumors to the effect that various Hitmen are preparing to or have already stepped off from Puff and Bad Boy have been exacerbated by the formation of individual Hitmen-related production companies and labels such as Nashiem's Top of New York Productions, Ron Lawrence's Ron Lawrence Productions, Chuckly Thompson's Chuck Life Productions, and Stevie J.'s Stevie J. Productions (Stevie, for example, will be collaborating with VIBE founder Quincy Jones on film scores for DreamWorks). Though Deric Angelettie recently left his A&R post at Bad Boy to oversee his own Crazy Cat Records label, he vehemently denies any behind-the-scenes unrest.

"There's no negativity in me leaving," he says, as Puff said when he left Andre Harrell's Uptown Entertainment nearly five years ago. ("I'm not ungrateful for what I've received," Combs told VIBE then. "This ain't no sad ending.") "In fact, it's endorsed. When Puff assembled us, the first thing he said was, 'It's gonna take time for y'all to become what y'all need to become, but at the end of the rainbow, there could be label deals, production deals...' So kill all the rumors. If Stevie J. leaves, if Deric leaves, we're still Hitmen. Our line to each other is, 'Once a Bad Boy, always a Bad Boy.'"

However, when asked to confirm or deny the rumors that he is, in fact, leaving the Hitmen, Stevie J. is less adamantly clear about his allegiances: "My dedication is to God and my family. I have dedication to Puff for putting me down, but it also comes to a point where you have to step out and create your own entity. I have to accomplish things on my own and get my own name. I want to see my name in the big lights without Puff as well as with Puff."

"Oh, they've flipped out on me," Combs says of the task of juggling his Hitmen. "Stevie J. or whoever will flip out on me 'cause they wanna shine! Everybody's in this to shine! And they deserve to shine. And it's my job as their manager to stay on top of [things]."

"But I'm not perfect," says Puff. "Something

may fall through the cracks—it may be a messed-up credit. But it's nothing that would ever be intentional. I appreciate the Hitmen. Without them I wouldn't have had the success that I've had."

To trace how the Hitmen came into being, you need only take a glance over your shoulder at the past few decades of black popular music. Dynasties such as Berry Gordy's Motown and Kenneth Gamble and Leon Huff's Philadelphia International carved their place in black pop's Mount Rushmore by way of workhorse teams of in-house producers, writers, and musicians capable of churning out polished hit singles in assembly-line fashion. In painstakingly similar form, Bad Boy represents today's Sound of Young America, the slogan under which Motown operated during its greatest years.

"A lot of times you'll just do [a track], and you'll say, 'Okay, it's cool,'" says Mario Winans, 23, of gospel music's never-ending Winans family. After his '97 solo album for Motown was shelved, Mario jumped at the chance to join the Hitmen. His slot as stage musician on Puff's recent No Way Out tour as well as his contributions to remixes like the infectious, dancehall-rhythmed face-lift of "Been Around the World" have already demonstrated his value to the Bad Boy roster. "But Puff's made me realize that 'just cool' is not enough. It has to be done to where there's nothing else that can be done to it to make it better. If you gotta stay up four days straight—stay up four days straight."

The youngest Hitman at age 19, last year Richard "Young Lord" Frieron chalked up a successful street single in "You Ain't a Killer" for fellow Bronx resident Big Punisher. However, after initially signing on with Bad Boy four years ago, the ilylly youngsta required some valuable words of wisdom under Puff's production tutelage before he got the opportunity to work on the big stage.

"Puff hated my tracks!" Young Lord recalls. "When I first got down, we was in the elevator in the Hit Factory in early '95, and he looked at me and said, 'You gotta learn how to dance.' He said it'd help my tracks. [After that,] he had me in the clubs with him every weekend."

It's no secret that Combs has always shrewdly navigated the politics of dancing. Just as his showbiz legend began as a party-promoting student at D.C.'s Howard University in the mid-'80s, so too began the formation of his beat-packing roots. Ron Lawrence reflects on these school days, a time in which some major components of Bad Boy's present personnel—him, Combs, Angelettie, Thompson, Myrick, and Bad Boy VP of A&R Harve Pierre—first bumped heads:

"At the time, probably seventy percent of Howard was New Yorkers," he recalls. "So we brought the music with us; we brought the style of dress with us. And in trying to keep that vibe, we would throw parties all over the campus. You had guys like Puff and Deric forming their little team as party promoters just to keep that New York spirit alive."

While Lawrence and Angelettie, then going by the stage names Amen-Ra and D.O.P. (the D-Dot arose from that abbreviation), left school to pur-

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sue their ill-fated career as rappers, Combs also left to intern at New York's Uptown Records, and went on to cultivate acts such as Jodeci and Mary J. Blige. After leaving Uptown, Combs remembered his old D.C. crew when the time came to embark on his new enterprise.

Times were once hard on the boulevard. Pulling out his wallet, Deric reveals a simple business card—dating back to the late 1980s—adorned with his and Combs's Howard production team logo. In the bottom left corner, his college pal's name simply reads SEAN (PUF) COMBS.

"When B.I.G. died," he reflects, "it was real trying for us. I didn't really know what to say to Puff. After I flew home, I went and dug in my old stuff, and I pulled out this card. [I showed it to Puff] just to keep him happy and motivated. I carry it around in my wallet with me to remind me of how far we've come."

What what! What what! screams the voice of Lefrak. Queens rhyme terrorist Noreaga over the A-Room system at Daddy's House. Turning up the volume on the studio monitors until the mixing boards' LED meters peak well into the red, Nasheim Myrick, 28, nods his head; his eyes are closed. A murky collage of abrasions punctuated by a clipped vocal loop and a performance from Busta Rhymes at his most rabid, Nore's appropriately titled "What What" bears little resemblance to the polished, club-ready jams usually associated with Bad Boy.

As we step out of studio A and into another room, Nash signals to a bassist and a guitarist. He pushes them to continue vamping over L.T.D.'s

1977 funk classic "Back in Love Again"—a more typical Bad Boy musical basis—for a forthcoming Spinderella solo track.

"The concept is good [for this song]," he says of the unfolding piece. "If I can get Canibus to rhyme with Spinderella, and they do this 'Back in Love Again' sequence...It'll be hot if I can get Johnny Gill to sing the hook. It's a lovin' song to make people happy. That's the type of song she needs." There's nothing that Nasheim can't do from behind the boards—be it hardcore or popcore.

The man behind street favorites like Biggie's "Who Shot Ya?," Lil' Kim's "Queen B@#Sh," and Capone-N-Noreaga's "T.O.N.Y. (Top of New York)," as well as Puff's "Can't Nobody Hold Me Down" and Mase's "What You Want" has obviously come a long way since his stint as Bad Boy's original studio intern—a gig he landed after Stix en Stonz (his rap crew with longtime friend and Howard grad Harve Pierre) were dropped from Payday Records without a release. Back then, the label's HQ was PD's suburban Scarsdale, New York home.

"Puffy had a little Volkswagen Rabbit back then," reminisces Chucky. "And that was the transportation for everybody. If we had to go to the city, everybody piled up in the Rabbit. [Former Bad Boy President] Kirk Burrows would be in the backseat with his briefcase, with papers everywhere."

Though Bad Boy's initial 1994 projects, Biggie's *Ready to Die* and Craig Mack's *Project: Funk Da World*, received multiplatinum and gold plaques, respectively, Combs saw the need to fortify his creative weaponry. Seeking refuge from the Bad Boy vs. Death Row controversies that loomed during spring 1996, he handpicked the center of his new

hitmaking team—Deric, Stevie, Ron, Nasheim, and his production partner, Memphis, Tennessee-based Carlos Broady, along with Daddy's House engineer Doug Wilson—and skipped town to conduct a makeshift boot camp of round-the-clock beat-making and producing at Caribbean Sound Basin studios in Trinidad.

"There was just so much going on over here as far as all the rumors with the East-West stuff," Puffy explains. "I was renegotiating my deal with Arista, and there was a lot of pressure and stress for me. I just wanted to go away and get back to why I got into this [business]—which is making music."

"It took us four weeks, and every single day it was clockwork," says Lawrence. "By the end of each day we had at least four or five beats cranking. And the result is most of the stuff you hear on the radio now."

Stuff such as "Benjamins," B.I.G.'s "Hypnotize," "Mo Money, Mo Problems," and "Nasty Boy," Faith Evans's "I Just Can't," and a host of other album tracks for various Bad Boy artists. Depending on who you ask, this Bad Boy production core (officially dubbed the Hitmen shortly thereafter) created between 40 and 100 tracks within that month-long trip. No diggity.

"We're learning and trying to get better at what we do every single day," says Hitman-of-the-week Mario Winans. "We don't want to be doing the same thing that we did even yesterday. We gotta make every day a month-jump ahead."

"My goal," he finishes with a snicker, "is I wanna [have us] control numbers one through ten on the *Billboard* charts."

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JEANSWEAR COMPANIES LOOK TO LONDON FOR INSPIRATION—FROM DARK DENIM TO DRUM 'N' BASS—AND CREATE A WARDROBE FOR NEXT-GENERATION NEO-PUNKS.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY BEN WATTS. STYLING BY EMIL WILBEKIN



Previous page: Black leather motorcycle jacket by Gucci; black stretch cotton tank top by J. Lindenberg; red cotton plaid button-down shirt by Polo Jeans Co. RALPH LAUREN; denim classic fit jeans by Nautical Marine Denim; boots by Chippewa; vintage belt by DKNY; rings by Robert Lee Morris

From left: Gray wool and nylon Union Jack sweater by Free People; denim miniskirt with white stripe by GUESS; black lace nylon footless bodysuit by Helena Stuart for Only Hearts; boots by Doc Marten; black hooded sleeveless shirt and blue burnt-denim jeans, both by Helmut Lang; Union Jack bag by Paul Frank; boots by Doc Marten; vintage belt; armbands by Jutta Neumann; earring by Robert Lee Morris; Union Jack cotton shirt by Tommy Jeans; black mesh tank top by Helmut Lang Underwear; dark denim cotton 201XX jeans by Levi's Vintage Clothing Line; vintage belt; sneakers by Converse; armband by Jutta Neumann



From left: Gray cotton ribbed tank top by Calvin Klein Underwear; dark denim jeans by Jiliana; Dolce & Gabbana; black leather apron by Tom of Finland; boots by Chippewa; black rayon matte jersey safety pin shirt by Todd Oldham; black classic five-pocket leather jeans by Polo Jeans Co. RALPH LAUREN; boots by Freelance; leather choker by Julia Neumann; vintage cuff and bracelets



Red, white, and blue Stars and Stripes stretch jersey vest and black stretch cotton and polyester jeans, both by Moschino Uomo; silver earring and key-chain, both by Robert Lee Morris; armbands by Jutta Neumann



Black 3/4-length wool melton overcoat with front placket by Richard Edwards; white satin jersey splatter print T-shirt by K-189 Daryl K; black leather panties by Diesel Females; stockings by Hot Sox; boots by Daryl K; vintage collar, Looking Good! Revlon Colorstay Lite makeup in Natural Bronze; STREETWEAR eyeliner in Imagination and Tar; Eye Sparkler Shadow Stick by Lancôme in Gold Gleam; Almay One Coat mascara in Blue; lipgloss by Professional Makeup Company in Deep Purple; lipstick by LORAC in Jada; Hair Streaks Illuminating Color Highlights by Lancôme in Flambé



From left: baggy denim peanuttan button-down shirt by Polo Jeans Co., RALPH LAUREN; green cotton tank top by Phibet Lung Underwear; black classic five-pocket jeans from Polo Jeans Co., RALPH LAUREN; black leather jacket in motorcycle jacket by Richard Edwards; white cotton tank top and red cotton tank top, both by Phibet Lung Underwear; black leather jeans by Tommy Jeans. SEE THE DETAILS



FLICKS

JEANS ARE A HIP HOP STAPLE. SO WHAT BETTER WAY TO SHOWCASE THE DOPEST DENIM THAN IN FRONT OF THE CULTURE'S LEGENDARY ART FORM—THE GHETTO BACKDROP? PHOTOGRAPHS BY PIOTR SIAKORA. STYLING BY RADI AGÜEROS



OPPOSITE:
Black cotton moleskin long-sleeve button-down shirt by Enyce; denim blackbox sharkie patch jeans by Mecca Jeans; sneakers by Nike; watch by TAG Heuer

THIS PAGE:
(From left) Mustard cotton button-down long-sleeve shirt by Timberland; black cotton duck neck dunehead's with single knee by Carhart; red long-sleeve polo shirt by Timberland; sunglasses by Ray-Ban; navy nylon jacket by Levi's Jeans; denim jeans by Timberland; sneakers by Nike; red long-sleeve cotton polo shirt with yellow and navy stripes by Timberland; denim classic-fit jeans by Nautica Marine Denim; boots by Timberland; Indiana Pacers hat by NBA

GET AT ME DAWGZ

Green and white nylon and diamond mesh authentic Jets jersey by Starter; blue denim classic jeans with side taping by Tommy Jeans; boots by Timberland; white T-shirt with logo by Nautical Marine Denim; denim carpenter-style overalls with white stitching by FUBU; sneakers by Fila; watch by GUESS?



TRUE LOVIN'

Blue Clima-F.I.T. Lite polyester jacket by Nike; dark denim jeans by A.P.C. Armani Exchange; sneakers by Nike; red and black microfleece windstopper sentinel jacket by North Face; denim loose jeans by Polo Jeans Co. RALPH LAUREN; boots by Timberland. SEE THE DETAILS



STYLE

SKIN TIGHT

They're back! Calvin Klein, Sergio Valente, and Jordache are hot again. And yes, you *do* want somebody's name on your behind.

Photographs by Guy Aroch. Styling by Emil Wilbekin

The heyday of designer jeans recalls the early days of hip hop. Block parties, roller-skating rinks (actually, you'd only wear a dope pair of jeans if you had mad skills), and park jams were filled with Sergio Valente, Calvin Klein, Jordache, Sassoon, and Gloria Vanderbilt. And of course, you couldn't wear

them any ol' way. What good were designer jeans if no one knew you had them on? You had to be sure your shirt wasn't so long that it covered the label. You took time to overdose on starch to get 'em looking like you could get a paper cut from the crease. God forbid you didn't line up the seams and ironed




the crease lopsided. Some of us even brought them to the cleaners for a permanent line. If they were faded, that meant they were old. And we wore them tight—girls and boys.

Later, when Run rhymed "Calvin Klein's no friend of mine / Don't want nobody's name on my behind" on Run-D.M.C.'s 1984 "Rock Box," the overtly "designed" jean fad had already fizzled. The jeans became a joke, and everyone quietly tossed them in favor of low-key brands like Lee, Wrangler, and Levi's. We would see the same designer fury in the early '90s with GUESS,

Girbaud, Polo, and Tommy Hilffiger; but of course, by then these jeans came in sizes extra baggy—with no sign of a crease. But now, everything old being new again, original designer brands are back. For these reissues, the style is the same but the fit has been updated. And since the best way to rock these jeans is tight, some hedz will undoubtedly pass on this particular trend. However, brand-name frenzy will always have a place in hip hop. For those who don't understand what's going on now, just think back to how badly you wanted those Sergios.

Mimi Valdes



PREVIOUS PAGE: Multicolored crochet bikini top by Petro Zilica; dark cotton denim jeans with white label by cK Calvin Klein Jeans; shoes by Manolo Blahnik

THIS PAGE: Maroon nylon high-gloss polar fleece lining vest by SRC-8; dark cotton denim jeans by Jordache; shoes by Manolo Blahnik. Looking Good: Estée Lauder Double Matte Oil Control Powder; All-Over Pencil in Tar by STREETWEAR Revlon; Bobbi Brown Essentials mascara in black; lipstick by the Gap in Fruit Punch; lipgloss by M.A.C in currant; L'Oréal Rouge Pulp Liquid Lipcolor in clear; Maybelline Express Finish nail polish in red caviar and orange knock; hold-thru hair anti-frizz hairspray by philosophy; Citri Shine styler glossing wax fragrance by Comme des Garçons Odeur 53



Cherry red nylon strappy fitted top by Vivienne Westwood Red Label; dark cotton denim jeans by Sergio Valente; shoes by Freelance. SEE THE DETAILS



Stylist

DESIGNER FASHION

PHAT FARM

Russell Simmons, founder of Rush Communications, rarely sits still. Until recently, Simmons simply ran his multimedia empire (Def Jam Recordings featuring LL Cool J, Foxy Brown, DMX, and Montell Jordan; Def Pictures; RSTV; *Oneworld* magazine; Rush Arts; Rush Media) by cell phone. That was until his neo-All-American sportswear line, Phat Farm, began to take off. "I feel like I can't get things done unless I'm at Phat Farm," says Simmons via cell phone from Los Angeles, working on the road as usual. "Now I go into work every day"—whenever he's in New York City.

And his newfound dedication to fashion has paid off. The five-and-half-year-old Phat Farm grossed \$25 million in sales last year, and everyone from Leonardo DiCaprio to Method Man is wearing his traditionally inspired sportswear. "Our mission is to make the coolest khakis and to make them a staple," says Simmons, who's also planning a women's line, some shoes, some leather, children's clothing, and more outerwear. "The classics suit me—and I want to be here for a long time."

Simmons is ensuring that longevity by creating durable duffle and pea coats, cozy cable turtlenecks, colorful classic argyle golf sweaters, classic oxford cloth, button-down shirts, and durable cargo jeans that are available at the Phat Farm store in New York City's ultrahip SoHo, as well as Fred Segal Santa Monica, or by calling 212-462-2911.

"I'm a forty-year-old hip hop person, and I'm making my kind of clothing because I like it," Simmons says proudly. Then he repeats himself for extra emphasis: "Phat Farm is my clothing—I like argyle sweaters, so I make them." Said like a true player! SEE

THE DETAILS.

Emil Wilbekin

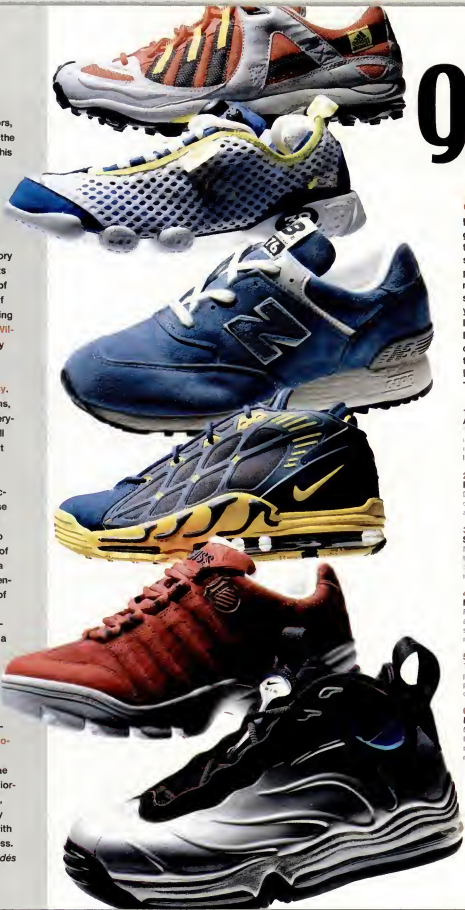


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scoop food for fierce fashionistas

Forget basketball sneakers, cross-trainers (as well as the other shoes featured on this page) are the ones to watch. The fun colors, designs, and cheap(er) prices are winning lots of fans worldwide. Crushing the competition in this category is none other than Nike. Its Air Sunder shoe flew out of stores this past spring....If you're an Atlantic recording artist, strike a pose. The Wilhelmína modeling agency has just opened a special division for the artists including folks like Brandy. It's all about the Benjamins, baby....If you worship everything labeled Prada, you'll be psyched to learn about the arrival of technical sportswear by Prada to these shores. The athletic-inspired line will give those MCs even more to rhyme about....Hip hop blows up yet another random item of clothing. Munsingwear, a line of golf shirts with a penguin logo, enjoyed sales of \$175 million last year (up from \$30 million the previous year) after becoming a favorite among trend-setting hip hop kids. Sean "Puffy" Combs helped set it off by wearing one in last year's video for "Mo Money, Mo Problems"....Emporio Armani sneakers? Just when you thought the Italian wonderdesigner Giorgio Armani had done it all, this fall he takes on comfy footwear you can sport with your suit—or evening dress.

Mimi Valdés



gear

The Real Goods

sneak peek

If you're trying to get some extrabuttery kicks for the fall season, bring this page to your friendly neighborhood sneaker store. Put your order in early, lace 'em up right, keep them sparkling clean, and wear these jewels with love and pride! SEE THE DETAILS. M.V.

1. Equipment Davos, Adidas, \$65

The color is a muted, muted blue, but it works anyway. This running sneaker doesn't look like anything we've seen there.

2. 3D Pump Opus, Reebok, \$130

It's a really interesting 3D design. The Reebok has an undeniably winner here.

3. 576, New Balance, \$150

How you too can't experiment with this. It's a really cool design. It's available in the U.S.A.

4. Air Total Pillar Max, Nike, \$140

Freshly, meekly, freaky! The artistic design and color scheme are some otherness.

5. Altezo, K-Swiss, \$65

This tennis shoe company just might see a revival in its popularity with this updated classic.

6. Total Air Foamposite Max, Nike, \$170

Metals? No, it just looks like it. The first sneaker to really exemplify the new millennium.

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Wild Thing

Subject:

Rosario Dawson, 19, actress

Work:

She's the sexy, sinister Lala Bonilla in the Spike Lee joint *He Got Game*. Seen previously in 1995's *Kids*, Dawson will also star in *Sidestreet*, an independent feature film due this August.

Routine:

Aside from being obsessed with clean nails, steaming her pores once or twice a week, and taking two-hour Vitamin E, aloe vera, or cocoa butter baths (wherein she reads scripts!), Dawson does little to maintain her beauty. "My skin goes through changes, so I tend to use different nonabrasive scrubs all the time," says the Latina (part Puerto Rican, Cuban, black, Native American, and Irish) from Coney Island. "Once I'm done with the bottle, my face doesn't respond to the cleanser anymore."

Secrets:

"Every now and then, if I'm going to be home all day, I'll rub a thin layer of Vaseline all over my face," says Dawson. "My sixty-three-year-old grandmother does this everyday and hardly has wrinkles." She also occasionally uses an organic dog shampoo with tea tree oil to get rid of hair buildup.

Must-Have:

Carmex lip balm

Transformers:

Makeup by Sohee for Abantu;
hair by Frederick Parnell for
Bryan Bantry

Looking Good: KMS Curl Up; John Freda ready, wear shampoo and glossing balm; Clinique pressed powder by Cover Girl; glitter eye shadow by Hard Candy; High Definition Eyeshadow in wild white by Max Factor; black mascara by Bobbi Brown; Essentials; espresso lip liner by Iman; razzy lipstick by Prescription; dark denim cotton and spandex boob tube and stiletto jeans by dollhouse. SEE THE DETAILS

Just because hot fashion designer Byron Lars is branching out into handbags, furs and hats doesn't mean he's lost his flair for the basics, as proven by these soft-as-butter leather pants. Shinning all by themselves, you'll be happy to know they also work well with a wide range of tops. Accessories by Misha McGlowin. Hair by African Pride.



I want her hair!



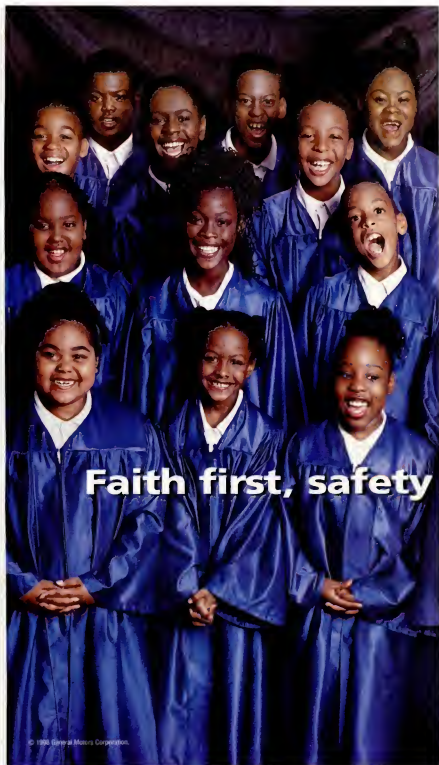
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Whether playing a hardcore jewel thief in *Out of Sight* or a tormented Sammy Davis Jr. in HBO's *The Rat Pack*, **DON CHEADLE** proves over and

over again he's the ultimate character actor

THE LAST DON

By *Stephen Rebello*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROBERT FLEISCHAUER

DON CHEADLE IS WHIPPED. Since the actor's actor stole the show from Denzel Washington in 1995's detective thriller *Devil in a Blue Dress*, Cheadle's been piling on the performances. Last year, he garnered attention for costarring roles in the underappreciated racial drama *Rosewood* and the '70s porn-industry saga *Boogie Nights*; he even escaped the cheese factor of the widely trashed disaster thriller *Volcano*. This summer he started off as a South-Central Los Angeles drug dealer in actor-director Warren Beatty's outrageous political comedy *Bulworth*, then graduated to a low-down dirty gangsta in Steven Soderbergh's *Out of Sight* before ending up as the inimitable Sammy Davis Jr. in HBO's upcoming biopic *The Rat Pack*. Who wouldn't be whipped?

"Who wouldn't be thrilled?" says the Kansas City-born Cheadle. He's hanging out at a hometown-style diner round the corner from his Culver City, California crib, where he lives with his two kids and their mother. "It's not the work that's got me so tired. It's that I've got two children under three years old who have this habit of waking up at 6:30, and that's the end of resting for the day." Not that he's complaining about his daughters, who very existence, he says, has started to color the kind of roles he takes. "If you're on a screen forty feet tall, you become part of the iconography. As Hitler knew, movies are powerful shit that have a great impact on us whether we want them or not. We really need to think harder about what imagery and ideas penetrate us."

Hopefully, no kid will want to try at home the stuff Cheadle pulls in his badass turn as an ex-boxer/ex-con in *Out of Sight*. The offbeat caper flick, starring George Clooney and Jennifer Lopez, is based on the edgy urban thriller by Elmore Leonard (*Get Shorty*). Cheadle is the most unpredictable and ruthless criminal in a crew of convicts—including Ving Rhames, Isaiah Washington, and Steve Zahn—who are out to heist diamonds from a rich Detroit businessman before the feds catch up to them. Think *Pulp Fiction* crossed with the vintage Steve McQueen movie *The Getaway*.

"My character, Snop," explains Cheadle, "is basically a bastard, an ex-boxer who thinks he could have been great but chose, instead, to throw his fights. He turned to heists and fancies himself a savvy pro on top of his game. I'd beg to differ, though. He's really just running games on himself."

It's another potential breakout role for Cheadle, and he knows it. "For a long time, I was getting scripts where the only parts lasting more than two scenes were gangstas without diversity or depth," he says. "We

were just there to kill and be killed. But that's changing." And Cheadle's helping change it, often by turning a potential stereotype into a tour de force. Says *Out of Sight* director Soderbergh: "Don's so magnetic, so compelling, that no matter how bad a character he's playing, you're fascinated as opposed to being repulsed."

Despite Cheadle's acting chops and magnetism, last spring's overhyped *Bulworth* starring Beatty as the hip-hop politician and Halle Berry as his ghetto girlfriend—may not have been the best of the 33-year-old actor. "I have an uneasy, unsure feeling about it," says Cheadle cautiously. "It's such a political, uncomfortable-to-watch movie. The issues [Beatty] is touching on are not only very unresolved; they're issues only a white, rich, powerful male could get up and say in a movie that is really about the white, rich, powerful men who've screwed up this coun-

turns, and you see his face pained. Then he just turns back to the audience and laughs some more. That stuff had to be killing him inside, you know?"

Sammy Davis has been treated like some uncomfortable minstrel presence when he was actually the Jackie Robinson of the entertainment business," says *Rat Pack* director Rob Cohen. "Don felt uncomfortable being the butt of so much racism that Davis seemed to accept. Yet Don has a rare swagger and sweet vulnerability as Sammy that allows you to feel his private pain. He's transcendent in the role."

Savion Glover, who helped school Cheadle for the part, was surprised by how quickly he picked up Sammy's fancy footwork. "When he first came into the studio, all he could do was a broken-down time step," says Glover. "But he progressed as a tap dancer, know what I'm sayin'?" He didn't



Blowhard: Cheadle as Sammy Davis Jr. in *The Rat Pack*

STYLING: TONYA WOOD

try and care only about money, not people. It would be great if, like after play, the movie audiences could meet the filmmaker and ask questions about what he was intending."

The Rat Pack—in which Cheadle, as Davis, croons, tap dances, and swaps jibes with original '60s swingers Frank Sinatra (Ray Liotta), Dean Martin (Joe Mantegna), and Peter Lawford (Angus MacFadyen)—is also certain to spark debate. Sammy might have been a major star in nightclubs, movies, and on Broadway, but his personal life—alleged mob connections, interracial love affairs, and heavy boozing—made him a lightning rod for controversy.

"It's very powerful playing someone hated for his life but loved for his work," says Cheadle of Davis. "To some, he was an Uncle Tom. Others resented him for how much he achieved. In one *Rat Pack* Vegas routine we shot, Sinatra and Dean Martin make jokes about Sammy wanting grigs and watermelon. You see me, as Sammy, cracking up laughing, but then Sammy

go through all the basics—no dancing at the bar or anything like that—he went right to the core moves. He picked everything up like he was dancing all his life. On the day of the shoot, he executed the role of Sammy Davis Jr."

The stage-trained Cheadle, who's been acting professionally for 12 years, says his attitude toward his work continues to evolve. "At the beginning, maybe in high school and even a bit now and then while I was training at CalArts, it was all exterior stuff—to be famous, get girls, be rich," he observes. "Getting older and having two little daughters has really morphed that. Now, it's about being in projects that are about something, and being proud of my work."

Clearly Cheadle's come a long way since his days as an extra on TV shows such as *Hill Street Blues*, *Night Court*, and *China Beach*. "Mention Don's name to any other actor and they just go nuts," says director Soderbergh. "He's simply one of the best actors on the planet. He can do anything." ■



DON'S FILMOGRAPHY

- 1996 *The Rat Pack* (HBO)
- 1998 *Out of Sight* (Universal Pictures)
- 1998 *Bulworth* (Twentieth Century Fox)
- 1997 *Boogie Nights* (New Line Cinema)
- 1997 *Volcano* (Twentieth Century Fox)
- 1997 *Rosewood* (Warner Bros.)
- 1996 *Rebound: The Legend of Earl "The Goat" Manigault* (HBO)
- 1995 *Devil in a Blue Dress* (Columbia Tri-Star)
- 1995 *Things to Do in Denver When You're Dead* (Miramax Films)
- 1993 *The Meteor Man* (E!)
- 1990 *Lush Life* (Chanticleer Films)
- 1986 *Roadside Prophets* (New Line Cinema)
- 1988 *Colors* (Orion Pictures)
- 1987 *Hamburger Hill* (RKO Radio Pictures)
- 1986 *Moving Violations* (Twentieth Century Fox)

movie reviews by gary dauphin

out of sight

UNIVERSAL PICTURES

Starring George Clooney and Jennifer Lopez, *Out of Sight* is a gritty crime drama with a glamorous Hollywood face. It opens with Ving Rhames helping Clooney, his ex-bankrobbing partner, break out of prison. Their mission: to pull one more big



job then disappear. But Clooney's escape is marred by a U.S. Marshall/hottie (Lopez)—the hunter who quickly becomes the *ER* star's hostage and ends up his pistol-packing love. With cold comic sensibility, director Steven Soderbergh keeps *Sight* true to the tone of Elmore Leonard's 1996 novel of the same name. Too often, however, the dramatic interaction feels as staged as a high-end fashion shoot (except for any scene involving the homicidal Don Cheadle and the drugged-out Steve Zahn). Though entertaining, this flick disappears from memory as soon as the pretty faces are off the screen.

smoke signals

MIRAMAX FILMS

When the father of Victor (Adam Beach) dies off the reservation, the Couer d'Alene Indian does not go to claim the body voluntarily; he goes because it's his duty. And he takes along Thomas (Evan Adams), the local oddball, because, well, Thomas has cash money. So begins *Smoke Signals*, director Chris Eyre's smart and moving take on contemporary Native American life. Adapted from Sherman Alexie's 1993 collection of short stories, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, the film uses seamless flashbacks and poignant cultural details to bring the three men (two alive, one dead) into an uneasy understanding, and to fill the gap between cigar-store stereotypes and downtrodden Indian odes. *Smoke*



may be a little sentimental in places, but it's powerful, and it marks Eyre as a promising new voice.

the governess

SONY PICTURES CLASSICS

In *The Governess*, it Girl Minnie Driver does a near perfect turn as a young woman trying to make her way in the damp England of 1840. The film opens with Rosi-



na (Driver) living happily in London's tight-knit Sephardic Jewish community. But the death of her father forces her to venture out, pass as a Christian gentleman named Mary, and "take employment" from an antisemitic amateur scientist working on the then new technology of photography. *The Governess* is a little frilly around the edges, but first-time writer-director Sandra Goldbacher makes good use of the mechanics of photo processing, while Rosina's "passing" gives this film an intelligence and edge rarely found in costume-opera, Merchant-Ivory noodlings. If you enjoy period films, then you should check this piece.

modulations

CAPTRINAM PRODUCTIONS

Electronica is king in *Modulations*, an edgy documentary by film director Iara Lee. To chronicle what she considers to be today's most interesting music, Lee dives ear and eye first into the futuristic electronica scene, hitting raves from Detroit to Japan. Dizzying crammed with fluid, hypnagogic images and sounds, it gives a breathless history of this music sub-verse, skipping from ambient to jungle to drum 'n' bass to trip hop. Besides a nonstop soundtrack, *Modulations* features rapid-fire interviews with the likes of John



Cage, the godfather of nontraditional art music, British drum 'n' bass luminary Phokee, New York City's DJ Spooky, and Moby, the best-selling member of the ravers' set. Picking up where Lee's previous technopop opus *Synthetic Pleasures* left off, *Modulations* makes a persuasive case that today's music of the future is more than just a fad.

reviews • reviews • reviews • reviews • reviews • reviews • reviews • reviews • reviews • reviews

dr. snakeskin's home video views

Grosse Pointe Blank hits a dark comedy bull's-eye

Like the Brits who colonized blues music in the 1960s, making mad money off a sound they didn't truly comprehend, Hollywood's recent attempt to co-op the flava of the 1970s black film era misses the point. The '70s were about, as Melvin Van Peebles said, "how to get the Man's foot out of our asses." It was not a criminal celebration of black-on-black violence, as Larry Cohen's *Original Gangsters* (1996) would have us believe. Oddly, the only recent film that comes close to reflecting the mind-set of the '70s black revolutionary is *Grosse Pointe Blank* (1997), a Disney-financed project starring John Cusack.

Directed by George Armitage—the blaxploitation vet who scripted *Darktown Strutters* (1973), my favorite film of the period—*Grosse Pointe* is a potent satire of corporate ruthlessness that disguises itself as a charming romantic comedy. Martin Q. Blank (Cusack) is the sharply dressed yuppie who could easily be mistaken for a Wall Street banker—except he's a hit man for Fortune 500 clients who take competition a little too seriously.

Martin's daily slash-and-dash routine is suddenly interrupted when his secretary (Joan Cusack) informs him that he has been invited to his high school's 10-year reunion in Grosse Pointe, Michigan. Knowing he'd have to face Debi Newberry (Minnie Driver), the sweet-heart he abandoned on prom night, Martin is reluctant to go. But after a botched hit, and consultation with his shrink (portrayed by Alan Arkin with black comic brilliance), Martin decides to attend. Upon arrival he faces various demons from his past, including his ex-boo's father, Mr. Newberry (Mitchell Ryan).

"I visualized you in a haze 31 one of those slackster, flannel-wearing, coffeehouse



misanthropes," says Daddy Newberry after seeing Martin for the first time in 10 years.

"No, no, no," Martin replies. "I went the other road. Six figures. Doing business with lead-pipe cruelty. Mercenary sensibility... How 'bout you?"

"You know me, Martin. Same old sellout," answers Newberry. "Exploiting the oppressed." *Grosse Pointe's* pleasure is in its sharp, witty dialogue and fine comic acting. A clenched-fist salute goes out to its producing team for convincing Mickey Mouse that anticapitalist propaganda makes fine family entertainment.



STYLING BY ANNA KAVAN. MAKEUP BY ZULMAH. HAIR FOR THE GROOMING. MAKEUP BY TONY MARRAS FOR THE GROOMING.

THE LION QUEEN

REGINA KING OPENS UP ABOUT ANIMAL INSTINCTS, LUSTY LINGERIE, AND MEN WHO ARE LESS THAN WELL ENOUGH.

From the moment Ice Cube's character, Doughboy, ordered her to the grocery store to buy a 40-ounce in the groundbreaking 1991 film *Boyz n the Hood*, actress Regina King has been swigging silver-screen success. Her strong and sassy take-no-shorts homegirl persona has enlivened numerous films, from 1993's *Poetic Justice* to 1996's Oscar-nominated *Jerry Maguire*, in which she caught mainstream love as Cuba Gooding Jr.'s protective boo, Marcee Tidwell.

In the coming year, King will be slipping into more roles than Sybil. She plays a fun-loving sister to Angela Bassett in *How Stella Got Her Groove Back*, a wildlife vet in the King Kong update *Mighty Joe Young*, and Will Smith's supportive wife in *Enemy of the State*. Today, she's hanging around Universal Studios' CityWalk, getting rowdy and real—like a girl from the 'hood who's made good.

Miss Regina, at 27, you are jiggy indeed in the Hollywood jungle. What animal's survival skills do you identify with?

Of course, the lion's. The queen of the jungle! The lion hunts and brings home the food. It captures its prey by any means necessary. People are afraid of the lion, and that's okay because trainers have lions for pets, so it's all a matter of knowing how to deal. Yes, lions can be intimidating by their looks—and I can give a look that makes people not approach.

Where'd you learn to conjure up such a scary side of your incredibly sweet personality?

My habitat, I guess. Growing up in South Central, I had to adapt. I was always the shortest person in school 'til the ninth grade. When you're little, people want to pick you up and swing you around. You don't want them to mistake your size for weakness, so you compensate by becoming a tough little tidbit.

Do you sashay and parlay with the Hollywood Black Pack?
Actually, I only see them at premieres. I don't really hang out like that. Our closest friends are married couples. L.A. is comy for hanging out anyway. It's not like New York, where you can fall up in Lucky Strike and have great food and take care of your business too. In L.A., you're either up in people's faces with nasty food or you're having a great meal with no networking. That's why I'm opening my own restaurant [this summer] called Paio, in Los Feliz.

It's been a year since you got married. Has the thrill gone?
Oh, no. It's too early for that. We still have hot sex and very much enjoy each other. He's vice president of A&R for Qwest Records. He's fine and the first short guy I ever went out with. No, I'm sorry, he's the second. I can't believe I married a short guy. Girls sweat him, though. I'm not a jealous person, but I'm not checking for the extra-more-than-a-hug attention.

Do you still wear sexy getups in the boudoir?
All the time!
What's your hottest fave?

Let's see, I have so many. I have these outfits in all different colors—black, red, pink, white. Well, I can tell you what *his* favorite is. I have this floral-print babydoll set. The bodice is double layered but the rest of it is sheer and see-through. At night, though, I don't wear the G-string. I'm not trying to sleep in a G-string.

Now that you have a two-year-old kid, can you still scream during, um, your romantic interludes?

Oh, hell yeah. We live in a big house, and my son is far down the hall, so we carry on. We have to wait, though, until late at night when Ian's sleeping or early in the morning before he gets up. And forget about making love in the kitchen and all over the house. Once you have a kid, you just do it in the bedroom. But we're going [to Cabo San

Lucas] for our first-year anniversary, so we'll be in full effect again. When you have kids, you have to wait for vacations to act crazy!

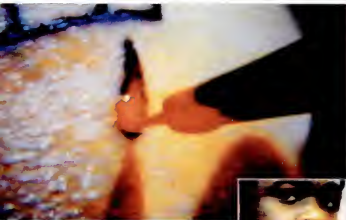
In Poetic Justice, your character really dogs Joe Torrey hard, calling him a two-minute brother....

A lot of people took that shit I said in the film personally. This one guy in Texas went off on me about it. I think I offended him more by laughing. I was like, You're joking, right? I was just playing a role. Maybe you need to complain to the writer of the film. The guy really got worked up. They had to pull him away from me. Poor baby, [must have been] a two-minute man himself.

So, have you ever had a two-minute brother?
No, but I had one with a really small penis, and I just thought it was sad. He was fine. I didn't say anything afterwards, but I didn't return his phone calls. I know that's wrong. We were dating for several months, and then, *bam!* we were all hot and touching, and I wasn't feeling anything, so I got nervous because I thought it might be a *Jerry Jones* situation and I was gonna find out that he was really a woman. Well, it turned out he was just small. That has to be hard. I know what I went through growing up with small breasts. One day recently, I asked my husband, What if our son grows up with a small penis? He was like, "Well, if genetics has anything to do with it, we don't have to worry."

What's your favorite daydream?
I want to be a flight attendant 'cause you get to be like, Coffee, tea, or me?! You meet all these business people, and you're only in town for a night, so you can do your dirt and be gone. Flight attendants are so sexy and dope. You see them pulling their little cart down the street with their overcoat flapping in the wind, running off to their next destination. I hope I get to play one in a movie. That's the beauty about acting: You can be all the people you dream of being. □

BY DEBORAH GREGORY PHOTOGRAPH BY NEIL A. FRANCE



Repeat Offender

Cannibals, murderers, and rapists—oh my! HBO brings 'em back with a new season of Oz, the prison drama that ain't for your mama.

By Mikel Husband



When it comes to Oz, Tom Fontana is 'bout it, 'bout it. The show's writer and coexecutive producer sacrificed his own skin for the opening scene (shown left). It's not prison issue, but that's a real tattoo.

The inmates of Oswald Maximum Security Penitentiary just don't give a damn. United by violence and addiction, these cons maim in the shower, murder in their cells. And if you piss one off, you may get a swastika burned into your ass—or feces dumped on your face.

Such is life on *Oz*, the hit HBO prison drama that doubles as an in-depth character study of down-for-the-count inmates and the men and women charged with their rehabilitation. The show returns for a second season this month, promising a more thoughtful but equally harrowing trip through prison hell. "This time, *Oz* is tough and shocking," says Dean Winters (*Millennium*), who plays Ryan O'Reilly, an Irish gangster serving to life for manslaughter, "but more cerebral about the toll on the mentality of the inmates." In other words, if *Oz* shows any gang rapes this season (as it did last year), it will also show how the victim deals with the incident.

Created by Tom Fontana and Barry

Levinson (the executive producers of NBC's *Homicide: Life on the Street*), *Oz* debuted last July and took an average of two million viewers on an eight-week emotional roller-coaster ride. That's a big following for a premium channel cable series. The attraction? Grim, graphically explicit scripts—precisely the qualities that repel some critics and make fans of shows like *Real TV* and *When Animals Attack* drop for more.

"Although much of *Oz* was impressive, I thought it was an example of how much better it is for an artist to work under some restraint," says Tom Shales, TV critic at the *Washington Post*. "I do respect [Tom Fontana's] work; I just don't agree with the choices he's made." Fontana's "choices" include scripting last season's kind but psychotic con who killed his parents, at his mother, and froze his father (he planned to have dad for Thanksgiving dinner). But even if they don't like the flavor, some critics still can't wait for another helping of the drama that won three CableAce awards after being

nominated for seven. "There's no way I wouldn't be watching or writing about the second season of *Oz*, because it is so in-your-face," says *TV Guide* critic Matt Roush, who adds that he prefers Fontana's *Homicide* work.

"I've rarely met someone who doesn't like *Oz*. But, when they don't like it, they really don't like it," says Lauren Velez (*Like a Virgin*, NBC's *New York Undercover*), who plays Dr. Gloria Nathan, a doctor in the prison's experimental cell block, Emerald City. Her character has an affair (sex and all, y'all) with an inmate friend. "The subject matter takes me to a place that I've only read about," she says. "It really does call into question my character's ethics. How far do you go in the line of compassion?"

Velez's character won't be the only one to get a juicy new story line. The drama promises equally uncompromising writing for the rest of the cast, which includes Ernie Hudson (*The Hand That Rocks the Cradle*) as the well-meaning prison warden; Rita Moreno (*West Side Story*) as a counseling

nurse; Eamonn Walker (*Shopping*) as the leader of the Black Muslims; and Harold Perrineau (*William Shakespeare's Romeo & Juliet*—the DiCaprio/Danes version) as Augustus Hill, *Oz*'s wheelchair-bound narator, who's a recovering crack addict.

To ensue a fresh take on the characters, Fontana used different directors throughout the season, from *Academy Award*-winner Kathy Bates (*Misery*, *Homicide*, *NYPD Blue*) to Nick Gomez (*Ultimate*, *New Jersey Drive*) to Uli Edel (HBO Pictures' *Tyson*). "Having interesting directors follows a HBO tradition of giving independent filmmakers a chance to play on a smaller canvas," says Roush. "It's almost like a playground of freedom and imagination." But the games on *Oz* seem all too real, leaving you, as its crack-addicted narator says, wanting one more hit.

Oz launches its second season with a premiere show, *Saturday, July 11 at 10:15 p.m. EST*. The eight-part series starts *Monday, July 13 at 10 p.m. EST*. New episodes follow each week.



Peep This VIBE helps you bask in the blue glow

July 1: *The Symbol of the Unconquered* (TCM, 9 p.m. EST) A brother in the KKK? Look carefully and you'll find one leading a Klan raid against a black frontiersman in this 1920 western by independent-film pioneer Oscar Micheaux. **July 11 and 12:** *Bug Juice Series Finale Marathon* (Disney Channel, 1-5:30 p.m. EST/PT) Do ten campers Jenny and Hassan hook up? Will Malik ever pass the 10-lap endurance test? Find out during the 18-episode stretch of Disney's *Real World*-esque drama about the pimply teenybopper set. **July 12:** *Intimate Portrait: Jenny Jones* (Lifetime, 10 p.m. EST/PT) Jenny Jones's money, breasts, and murdering guest—Ed McMahon cov-

ers them all in this biographical episode about the *Star Search* comedian turned talk show hostess. **July 18:** *Babylon 5: Thirdspace* (TNT, 8 p.m. EST/PT) All hell breaks loose when a *Babylon 5* squadron tows a mysterious mile-high artifact out of hyperspace. Aliens get mad. Telepaths go postal. Even a cunning intergalactic scientist (played by Shan Balafoutie) can't resist the craft's evil vibe. **July 19:** *The Net* (USA, 9 p.m. EST) Melrose Place star Brooke Langton plays Web-savvy Angela Bennett in the premiere episode of *The Net*, a new TV series based on the 1995 movie starring Sandra Bullock. It's like *The Fugitive*—only wired. *Rollie Thomas*



Cubana

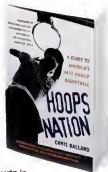
This anthology of short stories by Cuban women (Beacon Press) chucks Fidel Castro's macho politics into the crystal blue Caribbean. The writers, many still living on the island, reveal independent female characters—budding feminists who flounce long-forbidden vices such as homosexuality. In "Somebody Has to Cry," a cycle of life-long friends deals with the suicide of one of their own, a woman they suspect is a lesbian. "Anhedonia (A Story in Two Women)" captures the chance reunion of a bored house-

wife and a career woman with a stark intolerance for baby drool. Edited by Mirta Yáñez (an associate professor at the University of Havana), *Cubana* paves the way for an army of fieras—"fierce writers"—who crush the stereotype of Cuban women as voluptuous cigar-rolling vixens with thick thighs and domestic tendencies. *Anamary Pelayo*

Hoops Nation

If basketball is an American obsession, then pickup basketball is a gritty, spiritual antidote for the ails of the modern work day. In *Hoops Nation* (Dwl Books), sports-writer Chris Ballard describes how the game "lets you forget the rest of your life and focus on a single challenge—can you and your squad beat the five guys with the bowling ball biceps who've been holding court all day?"

Ballard and three friends drove 31,000 miles in six months and played on 1,000 courts in 48 states in search of the ultimate pickup game. The result is a comprehensive street-ball atlas, canvassing the best hoops courts in America—from West 4th Street in Manhattan to San Francisco's Potrero Hill. *Hoops Nation* captures b-ball's culture, codes, and ceremonies, humorously describing personalities as the no-skills knucklehead straight outta Foot Locker or the rim-rocking Rastaman "known to block a shot with his dreadlocks." Engaging and informative, funny as Muggsy dunking on Shaq, this book is a worthy addition to round-ball literature. Chris Ballard got game. *Michael E. Ross*



For the Record: George Clinton and P-Funk

You can repossess a Cadillac but not a spaceship. With this maxim in mind, George "Dr. Funkenstein" Clinton used his own money (\$275,000) to build funk's most famous stage prop—the Mothership UFO. The Godfather of Funk cranks out this and other stories in *For the Record: George Clinton and P-Funk* (Avon Press), one of three new volumes in a six-book set on music legends that includes *Sty and the Family Stone* and *The Women of Motown*.

Edited by Dave Marsh, *George Clinton and P-Funk* uses interviews with musicians, songwriters, and industry insiders to provide a fly-on-the-wall account of the group's evolution—from the Parliaments' finger-wave doo-wop days to their groundbreaking freak-fashioned funk. But read slowly. With so many musicians and offshoot groups jumping on and off the Mothership, it's easy to get lost in this story. The book taps into almost every taboo topic: money (Parliament members made more than Funkadelic), sex (Clinton beat his meat—a ham hock—in front of Aretha Franklin), race (some listeners thought the band were white), and drugs (Colombian Red was the toke of choice for some). And through it all, Clinton emerges as the celestial black star at the center of the psychedelic cosmos. Even when there're 50 people onstage, it's still his show. *Debbi Bass*



A Quest Called Tribe

Picture a Kenyan Samburu, a Brazilian Kayapo, or a child from Thailand's Meo tribe: their homelands may be separated by thousands of miles, but they're neighbors on the pages of *Tribe* (powerHouse Books), Japanese photographer Hibiki Kobayashi's ambitious new portrait journal of 21 indigenous peoples from around the world.

Kobayashi took a chance when he decided to shoot the tribesmen in their villages and then crop out their natural settings. He leaves his subjects exposed—sometimes literally—on the cold white page. (Perhaps he was trying to match the elegant tension Irving Penn achieved by bringing tribesmen into his Manhattan studio.) The faces in *Tribe* rise weathered, solemn, indifferent, and accepting. There is no accompanying text to explain, for example, why the Irian Jaya Dani tribesmen position animal tusks over their penis or the significance behind the Kamayura girl's face paint. With no context for their dress (or lack thereof), they seem, well, primitive. The reader is left to wonder if they knew or even cared how they'd be portrayed—or how much they were paid.

It took Kobayashi 10 years to find and shoot the vanishing clans in *Tribe*. The result is striking, raw, but ultimately dismaying. The tribesmen are our living ancestors. Yet in more than 100 stunning images, the photographer captured few smiles. Either they are terminally unhappy, or Kobayashi is trying to pull our heartstrings—a weak move for an artist of his caliber. *Kevin Giordano*



MINI MAXING

It's digital. It's portable. And it can record. So why aren't you up on it? Despite being a hit with clued-in musicians who have been using its convenient recording feature for years, MiniDisc technology has yet to make a dent in the popularity of the standard CD or cassette Walkman. But here comes the sleek and sexy Sony MZ-R50, whose power and versatility deserve props. Adaptable (its synchronized recording works with any source—DAT, CD, or live mike) and with automatically adjusted sound levels, a flamboyant remote control, and comprehensive editing functions that make it easy to resequence your personal mix, the MZ-R50 could convince you to donate your cassettes to charity (then again...). At \$549.95, its price may be steep, but to update Mies van der Rohe: Less is still more—it just costs more too. *Chiedo Nkwocha*

BEAM ME UP, BABEE

Roland, maker of the thick-as-TR-808 beat box so loved by No Limit's Beats by the Pound sound craftsmen, has come up with the MC-505 Groovebox, which looks retro but sounds anything but. The 505 comes fully loaded with no less than 714 preprogrammed beats, built-in scratch effects, a MEGAMIX mode for real-time blending beats, and the revolutionary D-Beam, a light-sensor controller that's truly on some *Star Trek*-type shit. When you place your hand over the invisible beam of light, the D-Beam warps the beats like a hip hop HAL.

Duly impressed, we asked Samuel "Tone" Barnes—who, with partner Jean Claude "Poke" Oliver, composes the TrackMasters production duo (responsible for recent blockbusters by Nas and Foxy Brown, with albums due from Kid Capri and Femme Fatale on their own TrackMasters Entertainment label)—to give us the lowdown:

[Headphones on, Tone experiments] "Yeah, it's kind of different. It's like a keyboard sampler. Yo, that D-Beam is the hottest thing. That's some space-age shit right there. It's like an 'air turntable.'"

This beat is bangin' ...Yo, check out that high hat. This is cool, but I need something a little extra, like the ability to sample. But, hey, the beats are banging, and that air turntable, that's gonna be the thing one day." Words to the wise from a true master. *C.N.*



RING IN THE NEW

Remember when the telephone was for talking to friends? Nowadays, it can be your friend. Case in point: Nokia's curvaceous 6190 celly. Among the myriad available options are a database that stores 255 names and events, an add-on that allows the phone to work in both analog and digital formats (for all you world travelers), a superbattery that supports five hours of talk time, and a brain that allows you to send and receive faxes, as well as playsimple puzzle-type games (in case you're a player). You can even select from 35 different ringing tones to make you stand out from the crowd. Smaller than an electric razor and cheaper than a secretary (\$199-\$249), the 6190 and you are going to be joined at the hip—for real. *Mark G. Brooks*

BATTLE OF THE BUTTS

The Japanese game *Bust a Move* (Enix) calls gamers to deadly battle. But axes and rocket launchers are useless here. Instead, your ass is your weapon. One of a new genre of "rhythm/action" titles initialized by PaRappa the Rapper last year, *Bust* demands smooth floor moves—street dancing, pop-locking, and disco styles all represent. Plus, you can compete one-on-one with other players. Though the game is currently out only in Japan, stay tuned for a Sony Playstation version later this year. And may the best butt win. *Harry Allen*



INSPECT DA GADGET

Japan, the cute-fad capital of the world, has gone absolutely snap happy over the Nintendo Game Boy camera add-on. This nifty little device, which converts your game player into a digital photo lab, has sold a million units since its release this year. Simply drop the camera pack into the game-cartridge slot, take aim at any unsuspecting victim, and click. The resulting picture appears onscreen in black-and-white, ready for you to manipulate with the cartoon-style editing feature. Once done, send your funniest faces to the Game Boy printer (sold separately). A gadget worthy of *Austin Powers*, this gizmo should become standard equipment for junior high super-spies everywhere. *M. G. B. (bgm27@earthlink.net)*

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REVOLUTIONS



BEASTIE BOYS
HELLO NASTY GRAND ROYAL/CAPITOL

DEF SQUAD
EL NINO DEF JAM/POLYGRAM

BY S. H. FERNANDO JR.

You know hip hop has seen better days when the biggest jams sound like a remix compilation of K-Tel's '80s hits. What someone needs to do is bottle the spirit of '86-'88, when groups such as BDP, PE, and Eric B. & Rakim first made a splash, and let brothers get a whiff of the creativity and originality that filled the air during this golden era of rap. Overtime Def Jam artists the Beastie Boys and Erick Sermon (of EPMD) contributed to the excitement of those times and, over the years, have amassed fat catalogs. Recently, both have fallen victim to the syndrome where success breeds complacency, which leads to mediocrity.

fourplay

Their new album.

Bob James Nathan East Harvey Mason Larry Carlton



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On one hand, the Beastie Boys get respect because they have always kept one foot planted in the glorious past and the other in a better tomorrow. While their best songs sound more like old school battle routines reminiscent of the Cold Crush Brothers, the Beasties could always be counted on to up the ante on creativity with each new outing, being as irreverent and unpredictable as they wanted to be.

But on their fifth full-length studio set, *Hello Nasty*, the Beasties have apparently milked this formula for all it's worth. For starters, they have lost some of the youthful swagger that fueled their frat boy rap's high-octane edge. In the days of *License to Ill* (Def Jam), their unruly tag-team rhyming was ballsy—albeit corny. But just as rugby players eventually grow up to become investment bankers, the Beasties sound as if rapping were a high-paying job they want to keep: “Money-makin’, money-money-makin’” goes the empty chant on the album’s opener, “Super Disco Breakin’.” Songs like “Remote Control” and “Putting Shame in Your Game,” which follow, are loud, busy, and boisterous too, but they don’t cause the same commotion that “So What’cha Want” or “Rhymin’ & Stealin’” did.

Though past albums like *Check Your Head* (Capitol) and *Ill Communication* (Grand Royal) interlaced styles as divergent as hardcore punk and retro-funk in the mix, you can tell the Beasties are getting soft when they play instrumental interludes like “I Don’t Know” and “Window Sill,” which sound

The Beasties have lost some of the swagger that fueled their rap’s high-octane edge.

like ‘60s elevator music. “Flowin’ Prose,” with its vaguely ethno beat and whippy vocals, is cool, but it sounds more like something Tricky would do on a bad day.

A flashback to the Boys’ more unbridled days briefly appears toward the end of the album on “Dedication,” in which they give shout-outs to “Upper Tasmania, Scandinavia, the Albee Square Mall, and all the people in the Dead Sea” over massive 808 booms. They follow that one off with a special appearance by His Royal Highness of Eccentricity, legendary reggae producer-cum-ranter Lee “Scratch” Perry, who bestows some crazy wisdom; however, it’s too little and too late.

After a lukewarm EPMD reunion album, you’d think Erick Sermon would be a little wiser, but things don’t look too much better for his “new” crew, the Def Squad, featuring Reggie Noble (a.k.a. Redman) and Keith Murray. Though we’ve heard this trio on each other’s solo albums, this is the first time they form like Voltron for a full-length, *El Niño*. Unfortunately, like the Beasties, instead of dropping the powerhouse jams we’ve come to expect, they seem happy just to pay the rent.

Erick’s production style has gone from the thick, chugging funk of “So Wat Cha Sayin’” and “Gold Digger” (from his earlier EPMD days) to a more minimalist construction, which leaves you wondering if the green-eyed bandit is getting kinda lazy. “You Do I Do” is little more than a bass snippet over a simple kick-snare combo. Still, it’s at his best on cuts like “Can You Dig It,” which uses locomotive funk and deeper layers of sonic candy, backed by deadid strings.

As in too many albums these days, though, it seems as if rappers are spending more time on the skits than the actual songs, and *El Niño* is a repeat offender. The WDEF radio format that strings this collection together doesn’t work because it’s been done to death and it’s just not funny—especially when you have to fast-forward every five minutes.

When the creative juices aren’t flowing, though, they always have the covers to fall back on. In addition to “Def Squad Delite,” their “Rapper’s Delight” redux, the Def Squad also freak the bass line from Kurtis Blow’s 1979 “Christmas Rap” on “The Game” and resuscitate “Rhymin’ Wit Biz” with the Diabolical one himself making a cameo. Too Short also shows up on “Ride Wit Us,” a jam designed to bump in ya trunk, but for the most part Keith Murray and Redman hold it down on the lyrical tip. It’s not that *El Niño* is a total washout; it just doesn’t slam like you expect it to.

It’s a sad day when veterans like the Beastie Boys and Def Squad can’t deliver the goods, but all that means is that the rap field is wide-open and waiting for some new champions. Play on, plays.

REVOLUTIONS

MAXWELL 'EMBRYA'
COLUMBIA

THE TONY RICH PROJECT 'BIRDSEYE'
LAFACE/ARISTA

BY AMY LINDEN

At the end of the day, chances are that 92 percent of all pop songs are about getting laid. Granted, that's a random number, but accuracy be damned. The fact remains that getting some, be it everlasting true love or a convenient booty call, is the motivating force behind most of the music we dig. And as a subject matter goes, sex is not a half-bad thing to fixate on. However, what matters most sometimes is not *that* you call your loverboy/girl but *how* you call 'em.

As one might expect from two guys who got liberally painted with the loverman brush from the jump, Tony Rich's and Maxwell's sophomore

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RESULTS: DMX straight dogged his way to the top with a rugged flow on "Get At Me Dog" capturing a thunderous 697 pumps. Shaolin affiliate DJ W's "Don't Go Against The Grain" and DMX's grimy "Shut 'Em Down" photo-finished at second and third respectively. Hounding out the set were rude bwoys JAY-Z, FASHION ISMS and rap diva V.I.C.E.

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CDs are all about—surprise, surprise—sex and love. But these two singer-songwriters go about beckoning their respective lovers in very different ways. In the amorphous world we'll just call black pop, there are two ways to invoke the persuasive gods of love and happiness: You can work it with a serious song, or you can work it with a serious groove.

As he did on his 1996 debut, *Urban Hang Suite* (Columbia), Maxwell goes for groove. His is a dreamy, sensual realm where everyone just languidly falls in and out of love and bed, driven by forces greater than mere lust. Sex and love (linked together because, at his core, Maxwell is an old-fashioned hedonist) can occur regardless of spatial or psychic restraints. With all that freedom, it stands to reason that Maxwell's ruminations on said subjects have the barest minimum of structure or substance. Embrya (some goofy word Maxwell appears to have made up; he rivals the more talented Terence Trent D'Arby in the self-indulgent soul man department) is like the smoke that rises from the scented candle, not the actual flame. As such, Maxwell cannot be judged by such mundane criteria as hooks, riffs, choruses, and vocal chops. He is more a stylist than an actual singer. What

If Maxwell cruises in a car powered by the good groove, then Tony Rich's little red Corvette is filled with the high-octane fuel of serious, soulful songcraft.

you have—and what his fans expect—is neo-soul via ambience. And as a mood-ologist, Maxwell is quite good. *Embrya* is brimming with luxurious, lengthy, and often beautiful odes to boning, boho style. On tracks like "Luxury Cococure" (the first single) and the surprisingly linear "Matrimony: Maybe You," Maxwell finds the middle ground between erotic and ethereal as his airy falsetto floats over elegant, elastic rhythms, creating a hushed yet hip-swaying universe of passion. And then, like smoke, Maxwell's love songs drift away, fading ever so seductively into the background, where they stay.

If Maxwell cruises in a car powered by the good groove, then Tony Rich's little red Corvette is filled with the high-octane fuel of serious, soulful songcraft. Not just any songs, mind you—remarkably smart, clever songs with hummable melodies, lyric twists, turns, and scenarios that, naturally, speak of love, but thankfully do so without resorting to clichés or stating the obvious. Like Maxwell, Rich can indulge the artist within; but Rich works his stuff into a solid pop context. So even as his most metaphoric (what is a "Bed of My Heart"? Who cares?), Rich can still pull hooks, choruses, and off-the-beaten-path imagery out of his trick bag. Rich compares the loss of a lover to indigestion ("My Stomach Hurts"), creates lilting love songs about the art of not killing oneself ("No Time Soon," featuring slide guitar from Eric Clapton), and delivers the finger-popping but off-kilter title track wherein the object of desire is described as "having Halle's eyes." Even with generic missteps like "Cool Like That," Rich takes a giant leap forward into the ranks of Real Songwriters. Too bad he can't claim to make the same progress when it comes to his vocals. Once tagged as just a (gifted) Babyface wannabe, Rich has gone and upped the ante by adding Prince's dulcet tones to his pantheon of music mimicry. Now one can't help sounding the way one does, but then again Rich could try to alter his phrasing, just a little. It seems a shame that you never get to know just who the guy who writes the songs really, truly, is.

But to bitch about either Rich's or Maxwell's vocal skills is to sort miss the point. This is heartbreak music for folks who would like to skip the actual drama of it all. There was a time when soul singers worked their voodoo by reaching down into themselves and pulling out Emotion—without caring if their hands got dirty or, heaven forbid, they meant it too much. Both Maxwell and Tony Rich are too smart to be so vulgar. They know that, be it by way of the groove or the hook, they can still get some without working quite that hard. But in the end, isn't that all that counts?

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ANGÉLIQUE KIDJO 'OREMI' ISLAND

Afro-pop star Angélique Kidjo has made it tough to get through her newest release. That's because it kicks off with a head-spinning remake of Hendrix's "Voodoo Chile" that will make even the most jaded Jimi purist reach for the replay button. Though the novel interpretation—Kidjo's multitrack vocals outline the famous guitar intro—doesn't make the rest of the album anticlimactic (it would be hard to say that about anything Kidjo sings), it does make up for some of the less inspired tracks that don't stand up to the Benin-born dance queen's formidable gifts.

Several tracks (including the Jean Hébrail-produced "Orubaba") are too dated; they sound like Paula Abdul-style fluff. But Kidjo's commanding vocals turn tunes like the sugary "Loloye" and the otherwise pedestrian "Babaloo" into rousing, memorable excursions. She charges through "Itche Koutche," an aerobic funkster featuring Branford Marsalis, and the beautiful "Never Know" is a collaboration with jazz singer Cassandra Wilson. Though Kidjo's tracks could have been way more interesting (what would a Tricky/Kidjo pairing sound like?), *Oremi* still manages to charm its way into the winner's circle.

Tony Green



P.A. 'STRAIGHT NO CHASE' DREAMWORKS

On their sophomore disc, *Straight No Chase*, P.A. (Parental Advisory) have elevated the smoky sound of southern rap without losing their red-dirt gritty edge. This album is as funky as a pig in heat. Like the Goodie MOb (without the burden of spirituality) and OutKast (minus the abstract rhetoric), Mello, K.P., and Reese are as influenced by the lush guitar strings of Ennio Morricone ("Like We Do") as they are by the country, rock-slinging, ghettocentric lyrics of Master P ("Dope Stories"). On the seductive "China White," a cautionary tale about heroin, P.A. portray drugs as a destructive force—without sounding preachy.

As protégés of groundbreaking Atlanta producers Organized Noize, P.A. welcome the use of unorthodox sounds on their self-produced/sample-free project. So, while "Temptation" uses creepy electric noises that bounce like hip hop niggas lost in a mosh pit, "Crime Don't Pay" blends down-South, bass-heavy beats with gospel-like moans. And after listening to "The Lick"—an ill-matic, verbal movie about a crazy bank robber—it sounds as though P.A. might have overdosed on the brutal cinematic images of Michael Mann or Quentin Tarantino. With flashes of brilliance radiating throughout, *Straight No Chase* is the bomb.

Michael A. Gonzales





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TOO SHORT 'NATIONWIDE- INDEPENDENCE DAY: THE COMPILATION'

SHORT RECORDS/JIVE

You gotta hand it to Too Short. The brother kicked the same pimp shit for 10 records straight, went platinum damn near each time out, and then walked away from it all on his own terms. He never concerned himself with what he called "standing in a circle rhyming on the corner" or trying to "flow like water." Good ol' Short Dog just never stopped rappin', and he made sure that his paper was right at the end of the day.

Now Short returns from his self-imposed hiatus armed with his second label (Short Records) and *Nationwide-Independence Day: The Compilation*, a two-disc collection of songs that showcase both new artists as well as himself. Short squeezes off the first shot with "Short Dog Hit 'Em Up" and lets loose on all the busters and playa haters who've tried to put salt in his game over the years. And he sounds as ornery as ever, dropping vintage, ignorant Too Short gems like, "You always standing in a circle spittin' rap flows / You need to start pimpin' / Get some fat hoers / Break them bitches for every last dime / And buy your ass some studio time." Other highlights include "All About It," Short's duet with fellow rap flesh peddler Pimp C of UGK.

What make this collection worthwhile, though, are selections from up and coming rappers like Murda One, G-Side & Bombshell, Mddl Fngrz, AL Block, and Slink Capone—all worthy talents. Even Casual from the Hiero camp is rejuvenated, comfortable rhyming over tracks more clearly designed for cruising around Lake Merritt on a Sunday afternoon in a Lincoln than for a walkman in a crowded N.Y.C. subway car. But all in all, it's nice to see Too Short back in the game—still gettin' in where he fits in, *heccyatch*.

Todd E. Barber



REVOLUTIONS
BEAOTALING

N'DEA DAVENPORT 'N'DEA DAVENPORT'

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Atlanta native N'Dea Davenport (former lead singer of the Brit funk band Brand New Heavies) sounds as soulful as ever on her self-titled solo debut, a perfect mix of R&B, funk, and blues. Davenport's coyly seductive BNH persona is nowhere to be found on this album; instead,

her powerful voice soars over chunky bass lines, trusty rim shots, and wah-wah guitars. On the sexy, insistent "Bullshittin'," she wins with provocative boldness: "Love me / Boy, why are you bullshittin'?" She called on the legendary New Orleans Rebirth Brass Band for the delectable, horn-blaring "Getaway." *N'Dea Davenport* is simply a magnificent piece of work. Even without those three British guys, this woman is still a heavyweight.

Mykella Van Cooten



MARKELLE CLAYTON



WINK 'HEREHEAR' OVUM

Philadelphia DJ Josh Wink made his big entrance into the club world with sleek, loose-limbed remixes for the likes of Rozalla and the Cover Girls. With *Herehear*, Wink's major-label debut, the blond-dreadlocked producer seamlessly merges his commercial and experimental sides. Nine Inch Nails front man Trent Reznor's sinister drawl adds an unpredictable rush to "Black Bomb (Jerry in the Bag)," while wayward saxophones give "Hard Hit" a Philly-funk flavor. The real eye-opener is "I'm on Fire," a techno ballad featuring Caroline Crawley, who sounds like a soft-focus Jori Mitchell. *Herehear* is a fitting title; this incredible album is gloriously in tune with the moment.

Aidin Vaziri

LORD TARIQ & PETER GUNZ 'MAKE IT REIGN' CODÉINE/COLUMBIA

Lord Tariq, Peter Gunz



Make It Reign, the debut LP from the Bronx-born-and-bred duo Sean "Lord Tariq" Hamilton and Peter Gunz (a.k.a. Peter Pankey), is a quaint look into the revitalized music happenings on the streets of hip hop's original hometown. The album, which comes hot on the heels of the platinum success of their monster single "Déjà Vu (Uptown Baby)," has Tariq and Gunz breezing through a varied barrage of hard and soft backdrops replete with twangy guitar loops and driving bass lines. Infectious call-and-response hooks dominate the album's choruses, as heard on the player testimonial "We Will Ball" and the plush "Keep On." Playing middlemen to both sides of hip hop's consumer-driven realities, LT and PG attempt to regulate street corners as well as radio airwaves with their brazen, mightier-than-thou N.Y.C. soliloquies—failing at times and coming off convincingly at others.

The Lionel Richie-inspired "Fiesta" and the interpolated Michael Jackson hit "Starting Something" are blatant crossover attempts better left to the skillz of Tim Hardaway. Luckily, the mainstream heat ends there. The sinister "Sex, Money, Life or Death," a lethal street declaration, stays true to Tariq and Gunz's mix-tape origins, while the motivating Fat Joe and Big Pun-visited "BX Most Wanted" weighs in at a ton more than your average rap collaboration.

Though their material is far from groundbreaking, Lord Tariq's and Peter Gunz's complementary flows and lyric brashness maintain the steady pace of *Make It Reign*. Selections such as "Who Am I," which cleverly exposes various ghetto ills through a *Jopardy!*-style Q&A narration, and "My Time to Go," which questions God's existence in an unyielding, problematic world, add depth to the LP's overall legacy. Tariq and Gunz present a Bronx tale worthy of its borough's legendary byline as well as the attention of rap fans. If it's uptown that's on your mind, blame it on the *Reign*.

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MASTER P 'MP DA LAST DON'

NO LIMIT RECORDS/PRIORITY

On his new album, *MP Da Last Don*, Master P leads his No Limit soldiers into battle—ostensibly for P's Last Stand. While the self-proclaimed "Swamp Nigga" from New Orleans will surely appear on No Limit's neverending barrage of upcoming releases, this is P's (supposed) final solo album. What began in 1992 with *The Ghetto's Tryin' to Kill Me!* culminates five albums later with P at the forefront of his own iconoclastic movement.

A double CD, *MP Da Last Don* is the clearest manifestation yet of Percy "Master P" Miller's transition from regional ghetto celebrity to mainstream pop icon. As such, it succeeds in encompassing all of Master P's marketing savvy: distinctively gaudy packaging, familiar hooks and choruses, and collaborations with his platinum-selling No Limit roster, which includes Mystikal, Silk the Shocker, C-Murder, and new recruit Snoo Dogg. Though P has definite shortcomings as a rapper (simplistic flow, lack of thematic diversity), his loyal audience overlook them because, even in his own crude way, P manages to satisfy their fundamental need for a Tupac substitute and for sing-along hooks.

As fans struggle with the void left by Tupac's untimely death, P has gladly stepped in, blatantly appropriating his style. On "The Ghetto's Got Me Trapped," for example, one can almost imagine that it's Pac screaming "Niggas won't change, mama, till you bury meee!" / But make sure six TRU niggas bury meee!" Elsewhere, "Ghetto Love" 's interpolation of SWV's "Rain" showcases another P formula: Where Sean "Puffy" Combs jacks '80s hits and refines them into Top 40 pop fluff, P's Beats by the Pound production team shamelessly interprets current hits by mutating them with No Limit's own off-key harmonization.

In just five years, Percy Miller has become a true hip hop visionary. But unlike Russell Simmons, Andre Harrell, or Puff Daddy, Master P remains strictly independent and strictly ghetto. He is the voice of millions of rap fans throughout the Midwest and South who were largely ignored when the East and West Coast rap machines were feuding. P has become a national spokesman for this overlooked constituency, who've displayed their gratitude by faithfully purchasing every album that bears No Limit's diamond-encrusted tank logo. As he releases his so-called swan song, *MP Da Last Don*, Master P isn't just a rapper anymore; he's an institution.

Todd E. Barber

IMAJIN 'IMAJIN' JIVE

What is it with today's kids' groups? The 14 and 15 year olds in the new quartet Imajin are an undeniably gifted bunch, with sweet, fluid voices and impressive instrumental abilities; but like some of their peers, they try too hard to emulate their libido-drunk elders. The single "Shorty (You Keep Playin' With My Mind)" percolates with the innocent, buoyant energy of youth. But elsewhere, the boys too often get mired in awkward attempts at slow-to-medium-groove eroticism. Perhaps they should follow the example set by their supposed heroes, the Jackson 5, and focus on the more wholesome aspects of romance—at least until they're old enough to drive.

Elysa Gardner



Jamal, Olamide, John, Taiib

LOVE PHOTOGRAPH

THE HEADHUNTERS' RETURN OF THE HEADHUNTERS

Herbie Hancock
(center)



The long-awaited reunion disc by keyboard maestro Herbie Hancock's seminal electro-jazz band, the Headhunters, is a delicious feast of jazz-funk-R&B fusion. It's packed with percolating beats and fortified by tasty solo excursions. The '90s-styled Headhunters pump up the dance drive on "Funk Hunter," dip into the R&B-rap zone on "Watch Your Back," (featuring vocals by Pharcyde's Trevaunt Hardson and ex-Brand New Heavy N'Dea Davenport), and drift into unadulterated jazz territory on "Premonition," led by Bennie Maupin's bass clarinet musings. It's unfortunate jazz legend Hancock appears on just four of the 10 tracks; but luckily Billy Childs more than handles the bulk of the propulsive and rhythmically charged keyboard duties.

Dan Ouellette

MO THUGS' MO THUGS FAMILY SCRIPTURES CHAPTER II: FAMILY REUNION

MO THUGS/RELATIVITY

The second Mo Thugs Family collection is less engaging than their debut (*Mo Thugs Family Scriptures*), but for the first time, Bone Thugs-N-Harmony go beyond the crossroads of their Cleveland hometown to introduce new "family" mem-

bers. The sultry Wisconsin-born R&B singer Felecia is a promising bright spot ("All Good"), but Delle's disappointing male R&B quintet MT5 are mo' sappy than thuggish ("Believe"). Bone produce and make vocal appearances throughout much of the album, thus leeching *Scriptures* with their trademark multiplatinum flava. But even that doesn't save this uneven artist compilation from coming off more like a crass marketing tool for the Mo Thugs '98/'99 roster than a genuine "family reunion."

Billy Jern



LOVE PHOTOGRAPH

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REVOLUTIONS
BY ROB KENNER

BOOM SHOTS

"There's no business like the dancehall business I know," SUGAR MINOTT often sings, and he ought to know. The sweetest year-to-year singer in reggae is also the hardest working man in said business. "There's never a day I don't deal with music," says the 42-year-old rub-a-dub soldier who makes the competition sound like Nutrasweet night after night.

Born in the Maxfield Park section of Kingston, Jamaica, Sugar began his music career at age 18 with a harmony trio called the African Brothers. In 1977, he entrusted his honey-dipped voicebox to esteemed hitmaker Clement "Coxsone" Dodd. The results were *Live Loving and Showcase*, two of the finest albums in Studio One's star-studded catalogue. Sugar soon applied the lessons learned at Coxsone's to his own Black Roots label.

Herban Hustling (Heartbeat Records) collects 16 of Sugar's most succulent songs from the particularly fruitful years 1979 to 1985. **The sheer breadth of Mr. Minott's output is astonishing. An extended mix of "Hard Time Pressure" showcases groundation deejay Captain Sinbad astride a classical rockers rhythm section.** But the album's revolutionary title track (produced by Sly & Robbie in 1984) is perhaps the first straight-up computer riddim, released a full year before King Jammy's massive Sleg Teng.

"It was different; I like different things," recalls Sugar of the percolating instrumental that anticipated the dawn of reggae's digital age. "There was lots of people lined up to voice on that, but they couldn't manage it because it was so strange. If you notice, the only people who ever came out on that riddim was me, Yellowman, and Louie Lepke. It's a dancehall ting; we re-create them style all the time."

To grasp Sugar's impact on reggae as a whole, one must take note of the artists who owe their careers to his Youth Promotion sound system. The late great Tenor Saw's enduring classic "Ring the Alarm" was first heard at a Youth Promotion soundclash. "Where I come from it's just a lot of talent around," says Sugar. "Them time, youth and youth couldn't even come in the studio. You had to be a big singer. I just started something, and the word spread until everybody was coming in from all angle." Distinguished alumni include Junior "One Blood" Reid, Yami Bolo, Pinchers, and the late Nitty Gritty.

Though the sound hasn't played much in recent years, Sugar is as busy as ever. He's recently completed another album with Coxsone and is working on a various-artists project called *Return to Black Roots*. "In my crew, I'm maybe the second oldest person," says Sugar. "I keep the youth around me at all times and listen to the same music they do. Plus, I got all the Studio One in my head, all the Channel One in my head, all the Motown in my head, and I got the hip hop in my head too."

But after nearly 25 years in the biz, the pressure hasn't subsided. "There's no budget," he says with just a trace of bitterness. "The big record companies leave you to go and struggle and make the music. If you sing a new song, nobody want to hear it. Reggae has broken my heart big time. Too so fucked up, the only thing that make you feel nice is a spliff and good music. Right now, I can't even find my spliff."

Sugar Minott



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REVOLUTIONS
BEATINGS

STUDIO TIME

BY MICHAEL A. GONZALES

With rainwater dripping down his smooth-shaved dome, Aaron Hall and his obedient retriever Creature stroll into a Manhattan recording studio called the Hit Factory. He's dressed in a flowing leather jacket, brown leather pants, and a leopard-print silk shirt—a style that still embraces the freaky persona he developed back in the late '80s as lead singer of the groundbreaking new jack swing trio Guy.

It's been five long years since Aaron released his solo debut, *The Truth*, which featured the depressing hit "I Miss You." However, fans will not be disappointed by his new work in progress. With *Inside of You* (MCA), scheduled for a late summer release, **Aaron Hall still manages to walk the fine line separating the God-fearing preacher's son from the swive-hipped nasty man.** He dabbles in everything from the gospel-inspired "None but the Righteous" to the brazenly erotic "Freak," in which Hall demands: "Get the whipped cream; I'll get the Alize."

Laughing, he says before today's recording session begins, "I have a lot of friends who are exotic dancers, and I enjoy creating songs for them." But he also turned to Faith Evans as a source of motivation. "She was a huge inspiration on this project," says Aaron as their collaboration "If You Leave Me Now" drifts from the speakers like soothing incense. It opens with melodic strings before kicking into the soaring vocals, and Faith sweet-



Aaron and Creature

ly sings, "Do you believe me when I say I love you?" "When we first started working together, Faith had writer's block," explains Aaron, "but that soon changed. We recorded two songs in one night. Faith is not a singer who likes to be in the studio all night, but that evening we were on a roll."

Hall's massive dog (just one of his 30 canines) licks his paws incessantly while Aaron kills time before his session by playing a few sorrowful melodies, including bits from Guy classics, on the gleaming black Yamaha piano. "With the exception of Chung King Studios," Aaron explains, "the people at the Hit Factory are the only folks who allow me to bring my dogs with me. They're kind of like my family, as well as my good luck charms. And any studio that can accept my family is cool with me."

But the beautiful, jet black beast with the jiggly red leash looks bored as he and Aaron now sit behind the mixing board and play some of the hot new tracks. The singer's waiting patiently for the soft-spoken producer Manuel Seal (who cowrote Usher's brilliant "You Make Me Wanna...") with Jermaine Dupri) to return to the room. With arms heavily covered in tattoos that include the names of his three young children, Aaron leans on the console as the freaky, hypnotic "Move It, Girl"—a track that conjures up images of cyber-strippers bouncing to an electro-jungle beat—fills the room. Produced by innovative newcomer Reese Johnson, this song embraces the future while rocking the present. And when Aaron harmonizes, "Baby, I'll be by your side," you know this brother is telling the truth. It sounds like 1998 is the year that Aaron Hall will groove us all over again.

NICHOLAS PAYTON 'PAYTON'S PLACE'

VERYE

Nicholas Payton plays jazz the way God, or at least Louis Armstrong, intended it to be—with energy, passion, and a dry wit. On *Payton's Place*, his third album as a leader, the 24-year-old trumpeter delivers a collection of songs that vary in style and provenance but hang together with one common thread: swing.

Payton is a protégé of Wynton Marsalis and an alumnus of the bands of Joe Henderson, Clark Terry, and Elvin Jones. Stylistically, Clifford Brown is his daddy; Armstrong his grandpop. An accomplished composer and seasoned instrumentalist, Payton has mastered the vocabulary of the trumpet—purs, growls, brisk runs, legato phrasing, and a generous vibrato—in a personal way. What's more, he's perfected the ratio of lilting drive to laid-back pulse that defines swing.

Beautiful moments are abundant on this recording, starting with the funky snare-and-bass-drum groove that opens the album and sets the tone for "Zigaboogaloo," a tribute to drummer Zigaboo Modeliste of the Meters, the booty-liberating band of New Orleans fame. Payton and drummer Adonis Rose hail from that town, and it shows in the way they anchor both ends of the spirited Mardi Gras-parade bounce.

On the rest of *Payton's Place*, Payton and the band

smooth through a contemplative, elegant arrangement of the Stylistics' "People Make the World Go Round," deliver an exhilarating three-trumpet jam with guests Wynton Marsalis and Roy Hargrove (concept-checking Dizzy Gillespie, Roy Eldridge, and Harry "Sweets" Edison's 1955 *Tour de Force*), and burn through a few postbop originals ("Back to the Source," "Time Traveling," "Concentric Circles"). Stellar performances all around, but it's the striking rendition of Wayne Shorter's "Paraphernalia" that reveals how these superb improvisers (Payton, saxophonist Tim Warfield, pianist Anthony Wonsey, bassist Reuben Rogers, and Rose) have, in three years, grown beyond being a cohesive collective to become that most priceless of things—a band.

Suzanne McElfresh

SONS OF FUNK 'THE GAME OF FUNK'

No Limit wins again with the release of its first R&B group, a polished Bay Area quartet called Sons of Funk. The group successfully blend hip hop sensibilities with a '70s funk sound and style, and their superior debut, *The Game of Funk*, is full of sultry ballads, including the Isley Brothers-inspired

"Y'All I Want" and "Don't Wanna Let You Go." Even "Sons Reasons," their dreamy interpretation of Earth, Wind & Fire's 1975 classic "Reasons," is adept and beautiful. Master P adds his distinct, aggressive flow to the only up-tempo (and utterly romantic) song, "Makin' Luv to My B...." as well as the introspective "Time Will Tell." These Sons give their funky forefathers every reason to be proud. Charlie R. Braxton



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CHOCOLATE GENIUS 'BLACK MUSIC'

V2 RECORDS

Like Sun Ra, Jimi Hendrix, and George Clinton, Chocolate Genius (a.k.a. Marc Anthony Thompson) is knee-deep in an elevated cipher of emotionally primal and artistically fearless musicality. On his debut, the audaciously titled *Black Music*, CG's otherworldly *gestalt-noir* is in full effect. He croons over seductive muted trumpets, mood-swinging piano/synth/organs, spatially plaintive guitars, and sweetly pendulous drum 'n' bass. Mr. Genius's achingly intimate tenor transforms his personal tales of human frailties, screwups, and love's salvation into universally resonating experiences. From the heartbreaking melancholy of "My Mom" ("And my mom/My sweet mom/Can't remember my name") to the nervy "Half a Man," *Black Music* is a mesmerizing ghost dance with the fevered soul of Chocolate Genius. **Tom Terrell**



PURE SUGAR 'PURE SUGAR'

GEFFEN RECORDS

In a field crowded with creaky grandma divas and puny-voiced Kewpie dolls, Pure Sugar's Jennifer Starr is a refreshing club rarity—she's a vibrant belter with a soulful demeanor and a quirky fashion sense that's easy to envision teenage girls emulating. But there's actually far more to this diva-in-waiting than simple dissection allows. As she steamrolls through "Hands to Heaven," the first turntable anthem from the act's sumptuous debut, it's clear that she has it, that intangible x-factor that separates the wannabes from the real deal.

The fact that Starr, who is also a tunesmith with remarkable pop savvy, has found her way into the Pure Sugar fray is a testimony to the surprisingly generous nature of the group's masterminds, Richard "Humpty" Vission and Pete Lorimer, a top-shelf production/remix team who have earned stardom tweaking jams by Donna Summer and the like into credible club hits. Too often, producer-driven acts are woefully indulgent ego trips that strong-arm singers into second-priority submission behind the groove. Within the context of Pure Sugar, however, Vission and Lorimer are notably low-key, wisely opting for crafty arrangements that lovingly showcase Jennifer's star power.

Miss Girl maximizes the opportunity to strut by effectively donning a variety of moods and attitudes. In "Got to Be Love," she ramps with scalding sexual heat, while chilling with jazzy, Lisa Stansfield-like finesse on the slinky "Love You



From left: Pete Lorimer, Jennifer Starr, Richard "Humpty" Vission

Senseless." But Starr is at her absolute best when she cuts loose and playfully bounces atop the beat—as on the gleeful "Delicious," a giddy disco throwback in which she wraps herself round a sizable sample of A Taste of Honey's "Boogie Oogie Oogie." Her warmth and lip-smacking energy are so infectious that you've simply got to go back for more—again and again. **Larry Flick**

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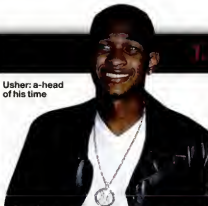
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1. Is Usher's head the **Bad Boy Entertainment** logo?

Usher: a-head of his time



2. On which planet is Downtown Julie Brown still considered "hip"? 3. *The Players Club* was cool and all, but wasn't it a little short on nekkid ladies for a movie about strippers? 4. Not that we're surprised at *anything O!* Dirty Bastard does ("Wu-Tang is for the children!"), but why is he claim-

ing his new name is Big Baby Jesus?

20 QUESTIONS

5. And is that tag better or worse than his previous "new" moniker, Osiris (the Egyptian god of the underworld)? 6. David Spade and David Chapelle are funny, but why is Cedric the Entertainer just as brilliant (and more hilarious in a far less cynical way)? 7. How can WalMart insist on selling only "edited" CDs but still stock shotguns and pis-



Dres/Def



The Larry Sanders Show is going bye-bye? 8. Since Fruitkwan and Scary Spice have that certain *sabor*, who else out there is ready for the Spice Girls and Stetsasonic to do a remix of the



Name that rapper

Floaters' 1977 "Float On"? 10. Back to teen dreams: Yes he's *fine*, but doesn't Usher's hairline make him look like a teenage Dr. Spock? 11. Don't you hope Eric B. & Rakim are getting paid in full for the use of 1987's "Eric B. Is President" in that Miller Genuine Draft commercial? 12. Does anyone still



Chris X

have one of those black baseball caps with the big metal plate on the front? 13. Doesn't Mr. Body Rock, Mos Def, look like the long-lost cousin of Dres from Black Sheep? 14. And while we're on the separated-at-birth subject, are Mya (of sounding-like-a-chipmunk-on-helium-in-"Ghetto Superstar" fame) and MTV's Ananda

tols? 8. That damn *Butter* was all right, but why are we about to cry because

related? 15. And, not to be going on and on with it but, was Public Enemy's Terminator X this attractive in the early '90s (and did he remind you so much of



Femme fatale

Christopher Williams)? 16. Seriously. Is Nicholas Payton killing that trumpet? 17. Is that *La Femme Nikita* kickin' ass, or what? 18. Has anyone bothered to scratch author Benilde Little's latest book, *The Itch*? 19. Why did a German boutique accuse Coolio and his crew of trying to walk out of the store sportin' clothes purchased with the five-finger discount? 20. And last but definitely not least, regarding the new Mo Thugs' *Family Scriptures, Chapter II: Family Reunion*, just how many mo' Thugs are there gonna be?



Mya and Ananda: maybe it's the hair

THE V I B e SPOT

A PARTY'S NOT A PARTY UNLESS VIBE THREW IT! CHECK OUT WHO WAS IN THE HOUSE AT OUR LATEST EVENTS.



1. Qwest recording artist Tamia showed us her *Imagination* at the debut album release party VIBE threw for her along with Remy America at Carbon nightclub in New York City. Robin Gibson, Corporate Accounts Director, VIBE; Andy Glover, Sector Manager, Remy America; Tamia; John Rollins, Group Publisher, VIBE/SPIN Ventures; and Danyel Smith, Editor-in-Chief, VIBE were all in high spirits.

2. Adding to the excitement at the Tamia event were Len Burnett, Associate Publisher, VIBE; Maxine Vance, Field Rep, KBA Marketing; Vic Tarry, City Manager, KBA Marketing; Tamia; and Justin Lapiusa, Field Rep, KBA Marketing.

3. The party's not over for New York Knick star Larry Johnson, who hosted the Boss by I.G. Design fashion show party at the Supper Club in New York City. Surrounding Larry Johnson are (l-r): Bob Arnot, Co-CEO, Boss by I.G. Design; Keith Clinkscales, President & CEO, VIBE; Tom Ormandy, V.P., Boss by I.G. Design; and Matt Pressman, Sportswear Sales Manager, VIBE.

4. Throw your hands in the air if you love Enyce, Alizé, and hip hop! The Fat Black Pussycat kickoff party at the hotter-than-July Miami nightspot Liquid was off the meter!

5. Staff of local paper *Miami Gold* take a breather from the dance floor with Phil Pabon, Director of Marketing, Enyce; Menka Lamba of Cataldi PR; Matt Pressman of VIBE; and Shaka Wilson, Head Consultant, Enyce at their event in Miami cosponsored by Alizé.

6. DJ crew the Baka Boys of Power 106 in L.A. chilled in the winner's circle with Funkmaster Flex at a Laker's playoff game. The *Starter Game Recognizes Game* DJ sweepstakes, featured in our March '98 issue, recognized the hottest urban music mixmasters from coast to coast.

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"Playa Hottain": Wyciof

On the cover: Dark denim jacket \$65 and dark denim 200XX jeans, both by Levi's Vintage Clothing Line (for more information, please call 800-USA-LEVI); white mesh T-shirt \$64 by Helmut Lang Underwear available at Helmut Lang Boutique, N.Y.C., Barneys, N.Y.C., and Rolo, San Francisco; vintage cowboy hat; guitar by Fender Strat.

Table of contents: Chocolate brown leather car coat \$1,295, white viscose T-shirt \$195, and black wool flatform wide-leg pants \$235 all by Emporio Armani available at Emporio Armani stores nationwide; hat by Kangoi; sneakers by Nike.

pages 74-76: Red microfibre flight suit \$100 by PNB available at Dr. Jay's and fine stores nationwide; boots by Timberland.

page 78: Light blue leather coat \$3,900, beige wool flatform pants \$500, and white cotton tank top \$995, all by Versace available at Versace Boutiques nationwide; sneakers by New Balance; hat by Makins Hats.

VIBEFashion: "Massive Attack"

page 120: Black leather motorcycle jacket \$2,740 by Gucci available at Saks Fifth Avenue and Neiman Marcus stores nationwide; black stretch cotton tank top \$49 by J. Lindenberg available at Pavingas, Brooklyn, N.Y.C., Alan Bilzerian, Boston, Ron Herman, L.A., Fred Segal, L.A.; red cotton plaid button-down shirt \$68 by Polo Jeans Co. RALPH LAUREN available at Bloomingdale's, Dillard's, and Polo Jeans Co. stores nationwide; denim classic-fit jeans \$49 by Nautica Marine. Denim available at select Lord & Taylor, Dayton Hudson, and Dillard's stores nationwide; boots by Chippewa; vintage belt by DKNY; rings by Robert Lee Morris.

page 121: Gray wool and nylon Union Jack sweater \$58 by Free People available at Urban Outfitters nationwide; Gente, N.Y.C., and Fred Segal, L.A.; denim miniskirt with white side stripe \$68 by GUESS? (for more information, please call 800-39-GUESS?); black lace nylon footless bootie \$75 by Helens Jeans; black and white available at Only Hearts stores N.Y.C. and Santa Monica, CA; boots by Doc Marten; black hooded sleeveless shirt \$88 by Helmut Lang available at Helmut Lang Boutique, N.Y.C., the Grocery Store, CA, Barneys, N.Y.C., and Rolo, San Francisco; blue burnt denim jeans by Helmut Lang available at Riccardi, Boston, Helmut Lang Boutique, N.Y.C., and Villans, San Francisco; Union Jack bag by Paul Frank; boots by Doc Marten; vintage belt; armbands by Jutta Neumann; armband by Robert Lee Morris; Union Jack cotton shirt \$78 by Tommy Jeans (for more information, please call 800-988-9888); black mesh tank top \$64 by Helmut Lang Underwear available at Helmut Lang Boutique, N.Y.C., Barneys, N.Y.C., and Rolo, San Francisco; dark denim cotton 200XX jeans \$235 by Levi's Vintage Clothing Line (for more information, please call 800-USA-LEVI); vintage belt; sneakers by Converse; armband by Jutta Neumann.

page 122: From left: Gray cotton ribbed tank top \$13 by Calvin Klein Underwear available at Bloomingdale's, Burdines, and Macy's nationwide; dark denim jeans \$240 by Jansland Dolce & Gabbana available at DeG, N.Y.C.; black leather apron by Tom of Finland available by special order at Charvatt, N.Y.C., World, N.Y.C., Flashy Trash, Chicago, and Rolo Undercover, San Francisco; leather armbands by Jutta Neumann; earring by Robert Lee Morris; boots by Chippewa; black rayon matte jersey safety pin shell by Todd Oldham available by special order at Todd Oldham, N.Y.C. (for more information, please call 212-249-3531) and Todd Oldham, L.A. (for more information, please call 213-936-6045); black classic five-pocket leather jeans \$335 by Polo Jeans Co. RALPH LAUREN available at Macy's, Dillard's, and Lord & Taylor stores nationwide; boots by Freelance; leather choker by Jutta Neumann; vintage cuff and bracelet.

page 123: Red, white, and blue Stars and Stripes stretch wool jersey vest \$355 and black stretch cotton and poly by Mordine Union Jeans \$44, both by Mordine Union Jeans available at Moschino Boutiques N.Y.C. and L.A.; sneakers by Converse; silver zircon and key chain, both by Robert Lee Morris; armbands by Jutta Neumann.

page 124: Black three-quarter-length wool melton overcoat with front placket \$675 by Richard Edwards available at Bloomingdale's N.Y.C. and Chicago, (for more information, please call 212-334-4280); white satin jersey splatter print T-shirt \$190 by K+89 Daryl K available at Neiman Marcus, L.A., Barneys, Intermix, N.Y.C., and Daryl K stores nationwide; black leather pants; \$99 by Diesel Females available at select Diesel stores nationwide; stockings by Hot Sox; boots by Daryl K; vintage collar.

page 125: From left: Gray denim premium button-down shirt \$78 by Polo Jeans Co. RALPH LAUREN available at Robinsons, Dillard's, and Polo Jeans Co. stores nationwide; green cotton tank top \$40 by Helmut Lang Underwear available at Helmut Lang Boutique, N.Y.C., Barneys, N.Y.C., and Rolo, San Francisco; black classic five-pocket leather jeans \$395 by Polo Jeans Co. RALPH LAUREN available at Macy's, Dillard's, and Lord & Taylor stores nationwide; black coated cotton motorcycle jacket \$415 by Richard Edwards (for more information, please call 212-334-4280); white mesh tank top \$64 and red cotton tank top \$40, both by Helmut Lang Underwear available at Helmut Lang Boutique, N.Y.C., Barneys, N.Y.C., and Rolo, San Francisco; black leather jeans \$195 by Tommy Jeans available at Burdines, Macy's, and Dayton Hudson stores nationwide; boots by Doc Marten.

VIBESTyles: "Flacks"

page 126: Black cotton muleskin long-sleeve button-down shirt \$80 by Eberc available at Coda, Dr. Jay, and Macks Cab stores nationwide; denim black-boy shanel patch jeans \$79.99 by Mecca Jeans available at Macy's and Dr. Jay's stores nationwide;

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DETAILS

(Continued from page 170)

sneakers by Nike; watch by TAG Heuer.

page 127: From left: Mustard cotton long-sleeve button-down shirt \$49.50 by Timberland (for more information, please call 800-445-5545); black cotton duck work dungarees with single knee by Carhart (for more information, please call 800-358-DUCK); boots by Timberland; sunglasses by Ray-Ban; gray nylon jacket \$59 by Levi's Jeans (for more information, please call 800-USA-LEVI); denim jeans \$49 by Timberland (for more information, please call 800-445-5545); sneakers by Nike; red long-sleeve cotton polo shirt with yellow and navy stripes \$65 by Timberland (for more information, please call 800-445-5545); denim classic-fit jeans \$49.50 by Nautica Marine Denim available at select Lord & Taylor, Dayton Hudson, and Dillard's stores nationwide; boots by Timberland; Indiana Pacers hat by NBA.

page 128: From left: Green and white nylon-and-diamond mesh authentic jersey by Starter; blue denim classic jean with side taping \$58 by Tommy Jeans available at major department stores nationwide; boots by Timberland; white T-shirt with logo \$22 by Nautica Marine Denim available at select Lord & Taylor, Dayton Hudson, and Dillard's stores nationwide; denim carpenter-style overalls with white stitching \$105 by FUBU available at Macy's, Kaufman's, and Robinson May stores nationwide; sneakers by Fila.

page 129: From left: Blue polyester Clima-F.I.T. Lite jacket \$100 by Nike (for more information, please call 800-344-NIKE); blue denim jeans \$48 by A/X Armani Exchange available at A/X Armani Exchange stores nationwide; shoes by Nike; red and black microfleece windstopper sentinel jacket \$155 by North Face (for more information, please call 800-719-NORTH ext. 153); denim loose jeans \$50 by Polo Jeans Co. RALPH LAUREN available at Bloomingdale's, Macy's, and Polo Jeans Co. stores nationwide; boots by Timberland.

VIBESyle: "Skin Tight"

page 130-131: Multicolored crochet bikini top \$180 by Petro Zillia available at H. Lorenzo, L.A., Scoop, N.Y.C., Big Drop, N.Y.C.; dark cotton denim jeans with white label \$52 by cK Calvin Klein Jeans; shoes by Manolo Blahnik.

page 132: Maroon nylon high-gloss polar fleece lining vest \$150 by SRC-8 available at Intermix, N.Y.C. and Nyse, L.A.; dark cotton denim jeans by Jordache.

page 133: Cherry red nylon strappy fitted top \$500 by Vivienne Westwood Red Label available at Bergdorf, N.Y.C., Barneys, N.Y.C., Traffic, L.A., and Intermix, N.Y.C.; dark cotton denim jeans \$70 by Sergio Valente available at Echo, Philadelphia, Fred Segal, L.A., and Antique Boutique, N.Y.C.; shoes by Freelance.

The Stylist: Phat Farm

page 134: Cream cotton cable-knit turtleneck sweater \$100 and indigo cotton canvas new wash utility jeans \$76, both by Phat Farm available at Jimmy Jazz, N.Y.C., Up Against the Wall, Washington D.C., Dr. Denim, Philadelphia, and George's Dept. Store, L.A. (For more information, please call 888-727-PHAT.)

page 135: From left: Black cotton varsity jacket with cream leather sleeves \$280, heather gray cotton and polyester classic hoodie \$75, black cotton denim painter jeans \$56, blue wool crewneck sweater \$225, indigo cotton denim four-pocket jeans \$56, navy acrylic dastman bennie hat \$16, camel wool and polyester toggle coat \$300, cream merino wool turtleneck sweater \$60, and blue cotton denim painter jeans \$56, all by Phat Farm available at Jimmy Jazz, N.Y.C., Up Against the Wall, Washington D.C., Dr. Denim, Philadelphia, and George's Dept. Store, L.A. (For more information, please call 888-727-PHAT.)

Gear: "Fall Sneak Peek"

page 136: 1) Equipment Davos \$85 by Adidas (for more information, please call 800-448-7906); 2) 3D Pump Opus \$130 by Reebok (for more information, please call 800-843-4444); 3) \$76 \$50 by New Balance (for more information, please call 800-253-SHOE); 4) Air Total Fillr Max \$140 by Nike (for more information, please call 800-344-NIKE); 5) Alzevo \$65 by K-Swiss (for more information, please call 800-276-0536); 6) Total Foam-piston Max \$70 by Nike (for more information, please call 800-344-NIKE).

VIBEFace: Rosario Dawson

page 138: Dark denim cotton and spandex boob tube \$20 and dark denim cotton and spandex Siletto jeans \$16, both by dollhouse available at dollhouse, N.Y.C., Macy's, Bloomingdale's, Nordstroms, and Urban Outfitters nationwide.

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Frank

Francis Albert Sinatra
December 12, 1915–May 14, 1998

Quincy Jones remembers:

Every night, Frank Sinatra came to work to take care of business. Like all the great singers—Bessie Smith, Sarah Vaughan, Ella Fitzgerald—he sang in the phrases of a musical instrument. He had the timing of a horn player. And like the great actor he was, Frank could take a lyric and make you believe just about anything. He was one of the best who ever did it.

He was a serious man. I remember, in 1965, flying out in his plane to open in Vegas. Frank said we ought to do "Shadow of Your Smile." It had just come out as the theme from *The Sandpiper*, and I had written the arrangement. I said, How are you gonna learn it by tomorrow night? He took out a yellow pad and wrote the lyrics down. Then he wrote them again and again and again, like 18 times—simple repetition to program the lyrics into his subconscious. That's when I first saw how his mind worked, his discipline.

When I met Buzz Aldrin—the dude who first walked on the moon—he said, "When we landed on the moon, I reached back in the space module and put on the cassette with you and Basie and Frank [*Fly Me to the Moon*, Reprise Records, 1964]." Frank's was the first music played on the moon. It'd never been there before.

Now, one of the major singers, performers, actors, and unique human beings of the 20th Century has just left the room. Frank knew how to do it. Everything. I thank God that I lived in his lifetime and had the opportunity to work with someone of his magnitude. It humbles me.



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